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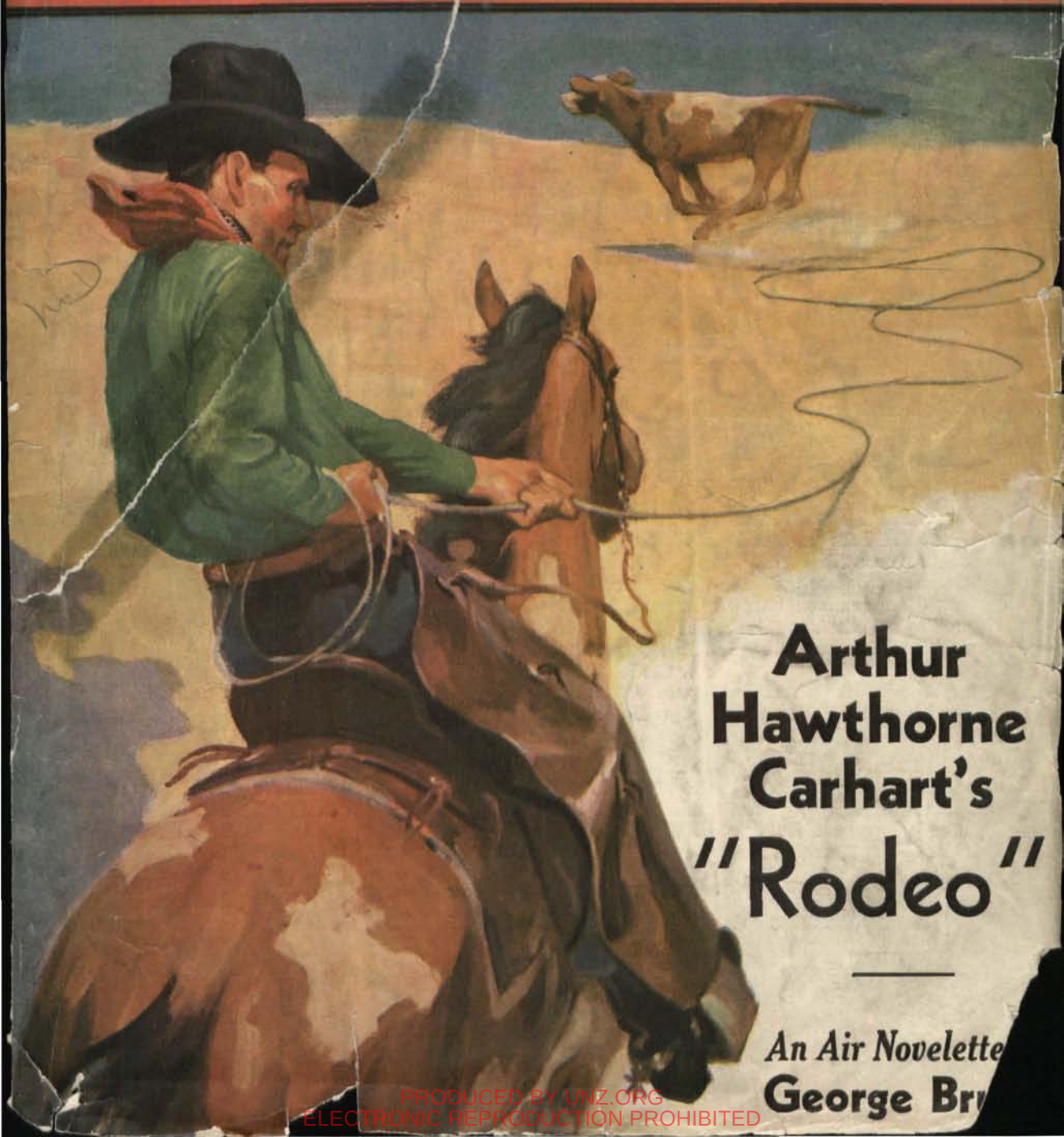

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• • •

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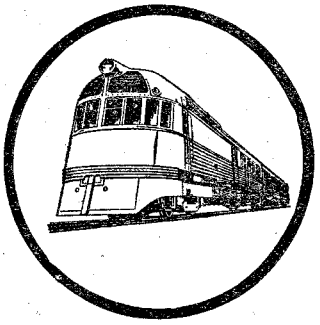

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Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 259 CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 9, 1935 Number 6

SERIALS

Rodeo (Six Parts—Part I) . Arthur Hawthorne Carhart 6
Drama in the West's greatest show

Eagle's Eye (Five Parts—Part IV) . . . Allan Vaughan Elston 71
A murderer's struggle to escape the past

Midnight Taxi (Seven Parts—Part V) . . . . . Borden Chase 96
A Federal operative turns cab driver in New York

Bowie Knife (Six Parts—Conclusion) . . . . H. Bedford-Jones 127
Frontier Texas in the days of Davy Crockett

COMPLETE STORIES

Black Ace (Long Novelette) . . . . . George Bruce 38
War in Ethiopia—and an American daredevil of the air

Men of Daring (True Story in Pictures) . . . . Stookie Allen 94
Gen. Smith-Dorrien, hero of Mons

Stairway to Rose Street (Short Story) . . . Stewart Robertson 116
—and Death loitering on it

A Nickel's Worth of Life (Short Story) . James H. S. Moynahan 121
Five minutes in which to live—or die

OTHER FEATURES

Wonders of the World—No. 45 . . . . . Alfred George 37
"Britain's ancient frontier defense"

The Valuable Coyote . . . . . J. W. Holden 70

How to Make Gold . . . . . Joseph W. Skidmore 115

Stretching a Light . . . . . Delos White 120

Argonotes 143

Looking Ahead! 144

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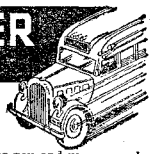

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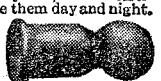

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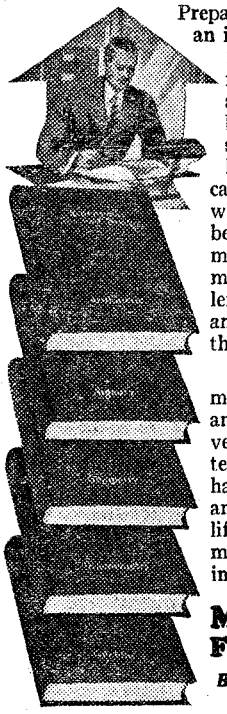

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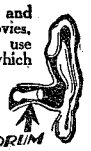

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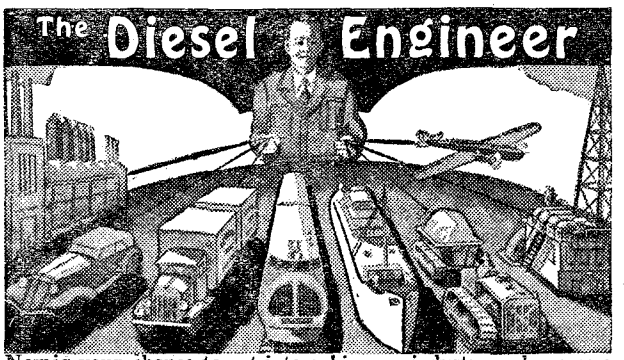

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Dr. T. A. Ellis

Because it is a special prescription for poorly functioning Kidneys, Cystex works fast to tone and soothe sore membranes, and brings a new feeling of energy and vitality in 48 hours.

Dr C. Z. Rendelle, well-known Physician and Medical Examiner of San Francisco, recently wrote: "Since the Kidneys purify the blood, the poisons collect in these organs and must be promptly flushed from the system; otherwise, they re-enter the blood stream and create a toxic condition. I can truthfully commend the use of Cystex."

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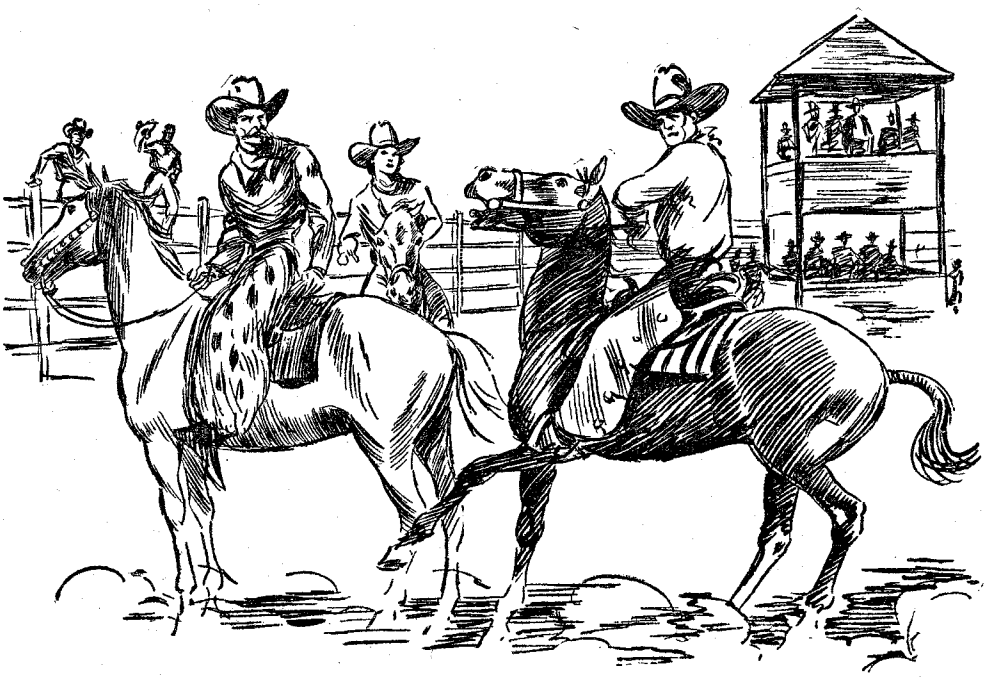
Rodeo

By
ARTHUR
HAWTHORNE
CARHART
Author of "Rodeo Roper," etc.

In rodeos as in everything else, Hi Lowe discovers, there's no trail quite so rocky as the comeback trail



CHAPTER I.

"YOU DASSN'T GET THROWED!"

IT was a day filled with trouble in ferment.

The air was hot and close. No clouds; just brassy glint filtering through miles of rare air between plains and the high dome of cobalt. No clouds yet, but storm-brew simmered.

Raw sunlight poured down on the big arena of Frontier Park where Wyoming's grand old rodeo, "Daddy of 'Em All," gallops and plunges from one moment when every breath is tight in throats, to another moment when the crowds yell in crazy approval or sudden relief.

The arena was ready for action and action would fill it.

Pageantry of Old West; barbaric colors mixing turbulently in the Sioux dance; grotesque antics of the rodeo clown and his trick mule; mad-charging six-horse teams as the Field Artillery from Fort Warren drills recklessly; shrilling cries and rush of cowgirls changing relays directly in front of the

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big stands; the insane plunge of outlaws that squeal with fury as they throw themselves out of chutes, pitching in high frenzy while riders sway in sure-cinched saddles—Frontier Days breaks loose, high, wide and reckless.

A squeaky voice yelled, "Powder River! Mile wide an' an inch deep. Let 'er buck!" The show was under way.

High, wide and reckless. But from the time when the grand entry paraded the track, and a Sioux pony kicked the daylights out of a race horse, ruction seemed bent on busting this day's show. As each event swung into action, trouble squirted to the surface in angry spurts.

The crowds in grand stands sensed this vaguely and were uneasy. Contestants squatting on their hocks around the judges' stand across the arena from spectators, draped lankily on plank-sided corral walls and bucking chutes, were keenly aware of the tension. Danger spots were appearing

Sixty Jones was in a bad way

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here and there, in spite of watchfulness of officials. Every man in the arena, contestants, stock handlers and members of the committee, knew the afternoon was pregnant with trouble, little or big.

This was a Jonah day.

After the Sioux pony had crippled the racer, the artillery rattled into action. They charged, wheeled, then went into a figure eight that required nice timing as big teams and heavy wheels criss-crossed in the middle of the figure. A caisson cut too close on the swing, swayed, toppled, pitching men aboard directly into the path of another team. Instantly, men, horses, heavy wheels snarled in a fighting mass. Desperate hands untangled it. Two injured soldiers were loaded into the field ambulance. The drill picked up where it left off, and finished, defying any jinx haunting the day. The slapping report of the field pieces at the conclusion of the drill seemed to rebound against metallic air.

The second bulldogger hoolihaned his animal; he jumped too far forward, his weight threw the steer's head down, and the big brute stacked up, nose in the dirt. The steer wrestler was under him. The steer's neck was broken; meat for the Sioux village. The bulldogger's ribs were cracked and his jump that was too far forward put him out of any chance at the fifteen hundred dollar purse. Tough luck, for man and steer. Just tough luck.

A Brahma steer threw his man and earnestly tried to gore him. A fist fight broke on the track following bitter argument over the starting of a race. Two bronc riders reached the limit of name-calling, then went at it, hammer-and-tongs, back of the bucking chutes. Ed Aldrich, committee chairman, helped yank them apart, roughly. Then Ed rode hell-for-leather to where two tipsy spectators had caught the spirit, and were knuckle-knocking west of the big stands.

Tempers were just that short. The human herd was uneasy, as critters are restless while tempests brew in cloudless skies. Always, Frontier Days moves like clockwork, without strife, but this was a different day, somehow.

THE amateur bucking went fairly well; one man kicked by a broomtail. A race was about to start in front of the stands. Then the Sioux would howl and dance. A chuck wagon race was scheduled after that. Professional bronc riding would crack loose when the chuck wagons left the arena.

Hi Lowe sat humbly, in the dust, near chute eight. He watched critically. He sensed the temper of the day. It sure enough was no good. Stoically he rolled a brown one.

He was back, after two years of banishment. Two years in which his anger had ripened, but not lessened. He was barred from contesting in the association shows just as he had been driving toward a championship. He'd been blocked, all because that slippery fisted Bagwell— To hell with Anson Bagwell.

Hi Lowe stood up suddenly, looked to where he could see Bagwell, over by the farther bucking chutes. Bagwell spotted Hi. They both scowled.

Hi Lowe was abruptly conscious of the grins of other rodeo people. He wheeled and looked away from Bagwell. They all knew, damn well, how Hi had got himself kicked out of the big circuit; or rather how Bagwell had had him kicked out. And they jeered; all except young Sixty Jones.

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'Course they'd remember all about it. Who wouldn't remember the record of Hi Lowe?

He'd been a stringy cub when he had come out of southern Utah. He was a wild kid; wilder than Sixty Jones. There was the wildness of big canyons and sage wilderness about him. But he was a roper. Something in the way Hi handled the loop made his lariat do wonders. He had swept through the short-grass rodeos like a chinook whirling through the Pawnee Buttes country. Landed in big circuit rodeos with a splash. Two years ago he had been near the top. Ropers are the aristocracy of the arena. Spectators may prefer the more spectacular bronc buster, but because roping is so much of real cow business, the range folk pay tribute to the man who can handle a lariat. He rates somebody in the West's arenaland.

Two years ago, Hi Lowe had rated.

But he'd lost his head; of course he had. Been drinking that day. Never had touched a drop until after he'd left Utah. He had been reared among tall, rugged people who abhorred the stuff. He tried it, once he broke away from the stern creeds and customs that had bounded his boyhood. Drink surely had betrayed him. Particularly that day two years past.

It all had happened in this arena. Hi's name had been called at the roping chutes. He climbed into the saddle. At the left were corrals and chutes out of which white-face calves were released. In front of Hi stretched the broad elastic barrier. When a calf is poured from the chute, a hazer shoos him over the thirty-foot line. That instant, the official at the trigger end of the broad elastic drops a red flag, the barrier is released to snap out of the way, and the roper is free to go get his calf. If the roper's horse crashes that broad elastic unintentionally it brings a ten second penalty. Crashing it deliberately *puts that roper out of the contest.*

HI remembered clearly how Anson Bagwell had been crouching at the end of the barrier, one hand on the trigger, the other holding the red flag aloft. Hi Lowe's calf was poured out. The pony, a crack roping horse, reared, ready to lunge, soon as the barrier flew clear. The calf scampered to the thirty-foot line. Hi saw the flag start down. He yelled, bent, put his weight behind the plunge of the pony, and then—the pony floundered.

For an instant the heavy barrier elastic flapped and tangled around the legs of the roping horse. The pony spun off balance. Bagwell jumped up, his hands waving in the signal of "no time."

Hi forgot the calf. He flung his horse around.

"No time," burst out Bagwell as Hi piled out of the saddle. "You spurred your horse right into the barrier!"

"That's a lie," Hi said hotly. "You delayed the barrier; you flipped that elastic to trip my horse."

"Shut up, you; shut up. You crashed the barrier. No time for you, Lowe!" Bagwell's black temper reared. There was a heap of bad blood between them anyway. "Shut up, you drunken bum!"

Hi went for Bagwell. The official was down when they tore them apart. Bagwell's pride was more bruised than his body.

But any contestant who jumps an official breaks an arena law that is sacred. Bagwell's story was accepted that night at a hearing held in Frontier Headquarters. To have decided against

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Bagwell would have been equivalent to opening season on all arena officials, even though Bagwell was none too well liked.

"That fixes you, Lowe," Bagwell had said in the hall after that hearing. "You've got awful high-and-mighty because you've crashed big time with that rope of yours. Think you're somebody. But you're not big enough to beat up on arena officials and get away with it; nobody is. If you ever get back at the end of two years, you better remember that. But my guess is, the way you're heading, you'll go to hell—and never come back."

Two years; and in it Hi Lowe had gone almost to hell. He'd have gone the whole route, liquor, girls and gambling, if it hadn't been for this kid called Sixty Jones.

Hi smiled as Sixty came shouldering through the crowd. Good kid, homely as sin, freckled like everything, but on his way toward the top in the bucking. Yessir, Hi Lowe would have been plumb to hell, just as Bagwell had predicted, if Sixty hadn't been riding herd.

"Watch chute number two," suddenly blared the giant voice in the announcer horns. "Tommy Blanney coming out of chute two on Plugged Nickel. Tommy Blannel on Plugged Nickel. Pour 'im out!"

The professional bucking was starting.

Hi Lowe and Sixty Jones watched as bronc and man twisted and dived from the chute.

"Ride 'em, cowboy! Cantle-board the son-of-a-cayuse!"

Someone who stood back of Hi and Sixty yelled encouragement. Blanney needed it. The roan kicked as Blanney fell, but missed, then the rider got up, brushed off copper-riveted overalls and stumped grumpily back to the chutes while the pick-up hazed Plugged Nickel toward the north-end corrals.

"Coxey Albert on Sweetwater Jake, out of chute four; watch him come!" The announcer system was like the roar *before* an explosion. The explosion came from under the big black figure four.

SWEETWATER JAKE was a rangy black that spun from the side-delivery chute, crow-hopped three times, then went sky-hooking and sunfishing in great, man-jarring leaps. The thud of hoofs was like the beat of mad drums. The hoarse belly-grunt of the bronc was a nerve-lashing sound, thinly cut by tiny tinkle of saddle hardware and the swish of leather and fabric rubbed violently together.

"He's blew a stirrup," remarked Hi Lowe without turning.

"There he *goes!*" cried Sixty.

"Looks like the broncs' day to win," drawled Hi Lowe.

Sixty pivoted. The kid's sandy lashes blinked. "How damn sweet and helpful when I'm comin' out on Wildcat," Sixty blurted. Hi Lowe stared. The kid was white around the gills. Hi recognized the signs.

"You're not only comin' out," said Hi slowly, "but you're ridin' Wildcat to the gun." He looked at Sixty closely, then said shortly, "Come back of the chutes. You need a kick in the pants. I'll give you one that'll jar you."

Sixty hesitated. He looked, once, to where the pick-up man lifted the stirrup-blowing Coxey Albert from Sweetwater Jake. Coxey Albert was good; and he'd blown a stirrup.

It was a jinxed day.

"I'm takin' no liquor to brace me," said Sixty Jones suddenly. "I seen

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what it's done to you in the past two years, and I'm not wantin' no whisky-brave."

"Who said whisky?" demanded Hi, angrily. "Listen, you can't lose your guts just because you've drawed a horse that's bad. The rougher they pitch, the better your ride'll rate—when you make it."

"If I make it."

"By God, you're ridin' Wildcat to the gun," burst out Hi. "I'm tellin' you somethin' that'll make you. Come along."

Sixty Jones followed slowly. They wedged through a narrow place between chutes and fence. Sixty was filled with angry revolt. Hi was more than half drunk again—as usual. But why in hell did he have to go that way now, during this show, when he was getting his chance to come back as a roper? It made Sixty ache.

Four years ago Sixty had come out of the short grass country around Sundance. He was a rodeo-struck ranch boy; eager to straddle a circingled wild horse that "comers" ride for five bucks and experience. Hi Lowe had been Sixty's hero; six feet of range man, rough framed, and upstanding; half homely in the face, unless you got a straight look at the gray eyes under the wide hat brim. Then you felt, somehow, the wild, reckless streak in Hi Lowe, and capacity in him for climbing up or going way down.

WHEN Sixty had met up with him, Hi had been on the crest; wearing hand-made boots, high-priced hats, hand-tailored shirts, of loud-shouting plaids. A roping wizard has to dress; or Hi thought he did. His head had been turned just a little, but it wasn't swelled. He had liked the kid from Sundance.

Sixty couldn't forget that. Others had made Sixty feel diffident and green; but Hi's easy friendliness had helped him get over that.

The star roper had no obligation to go out of his way so the kid would feel at home, but he had done it.

Others might call Hi Lowe a bum, say he was through. That booze, gambling and women had the skids under him. Maybe those loud shirts were old and faded, the boots scuffed. Didn't matter; Hi still could rope. Let 'em talk about Eva Lord, and her being the real reason back of that feud between Hi and this Bagwell. That didn't faze Sixty Jones; not a bit. He did worry when Hi shuffled in his walk. Hi was too young to get that old man shuffle; and dang it, sometimes he didn't keep his chin high like he should and he talked diffident like. But that would change when Hi was top roper again; it sure would. So, with the unreasoning loyalty of the range-bred, Sixty kept Hi Lowe as his big man.

They reached a spot back of corrals where buckers milled. Hi turned. He stared at the lean, youthful frame and Sixty's clean, slightly bony features. Hi remembered when he had been stringy like that; clean and tough. Before liquor put a little flabbiness into his fiber and packed little pouches in under his eyes. The instant of comparison twisted deep into him.

"By God, I wish I was where you're standin', kid," Hi said huskily. "Just ready to crash your first big-time professional contest. I'd never get down where I am now if I could start over."

Sixty spoke hastily. Hi could go from bad to terrible when he was part drunk and began pitying himself.

"They'll be callin' me to the chutes," stated Sixty. "If you've got anything to say before I ride—"

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"You remember—" Hi stopped, looked away, shook his shoulders and turned resolutely. "Remember, kid, you gave me twenty-five bucks to enter you in the bronc ridin'?"

"Sure; wanted you to enter me to bring me luck. I'd saved that money just for this show; saved hard. You know, Hi, you're my luck."

"Like hell," said Hi methodically. "I sold you out. I played black-jack with that twenty-five—and lost it."

"But—I'm entered," said Sixty.

"Yes," breathed Hi, "you're entered. I done it after I roped yesterday. I hocked my saddle."

"You—what? Hi, you didn't hock the old contest saddle you won at Pendleton."

"That's the only saddle I've got left, kid—and I ain't got it now, if you don't ride like hell when you come out on Wildcat."

"But, Hi, you knowed the risk?"

"Yeah, I knowed. But I didn't know you'd draw Wildcat. But, I don't care a damn. You can ride that bronc!"

"I won't risk it," protested Sixty. His freckled hand got hold of Hi's torn plaid shirt and jerked. "I won't risk it, Hi. I'll draw out, get my fee back, 'cause you've got to have that saddle for the balance of the roping; you'll have to have it when you rope tomorrow."

"I'm still bettin' on you, kid; bettin' that you'll ride Wildcat to the gun and get more'n my saddle back. Maybe—this'll show you a little just how I appreciate the way you've stuck by me while I've been goin' haywire. Others knocked and kicked. I couldn't let you miss your chance, even if it meant the old saddle. If it hadn't been for you doin' your damnedest to keep me decent, I'd not been enough in shape to enter here, and get my last chance—What in hell are you sniveling about, anyway? Got a cold? What in hell?"

THEY both stood, trying to down the chokiness that came. Sixty couldn't think of Hi pawning that treasured saddle, symbol of first big winnings, a lucky saddle, without Sixty's eyes getting bleary.

"For cripes' sake," said Sixty, and gulped. "For cripes' sake, if I get throwed, and you don't get the saddle out of hock. You can't rope tomorrow without that hull, and if I should get throwed!"

"You dassen't get throwed," said Hi suddenly. "A couple twisters eliminated already makes your chances better. All you need to win is third or fourth to place in the finals, and get me out of hock. Now, listen, kid; keep your mind on what's at stake. All I'm askin' is to ride your damnedest. You can top off that bronc."

"Say, listen, folks," blared the speaker system. "Just see what's coming. Sixty Jones out of chute four on Wildcat. Hear that? Mister Sixty Jones, the kid from Sundance, forking Wildcat. Say, keep your eyes glued on chute four— Wait—a—minute! Some confusion down here. Sixty Jones not present. Hey, Jones, front and center. All right, we'll have another man for breakfast while we're dragging Mr. Jones from wherever he's hiding. Jerry Lee out of chute two on Lazy Daisy. Pour 'em out, boys; out of chute two."

"You hear what he said; hear it, did you, Hi?"

"Yeah," said Hi. His eyes were very narrow. "Here," he said, suddenly reaching out a bottle. "Maybe you really need it, kid."

Sixty took it, raised it, brought it down, and the bottle smashed. Pun-

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gent liquor fumes steeped up between them.

"Listen, Hi," Sixty said with queer eagerness, "if I go in and make the ride, promise—you'll go sober. Will you, Hi? That'll be all the bracer I need, fellow. Promise, and mean it, Hi. And I'll ride that bronc to the gun if they have to scrape me up all over the arena afterward."

Hi Lowe looked searchingly at the kid. Sixty was scared white. But he meant every last word.

"Give me your word, Hi," begged Sixty. "I tell you, it's the bracer I need. Just knowin' we'll both be on the up-road, partners—"

"Kid," said Hi slowly, "I promise. If you ride to the finish and get back the old saddle, I'll rope into the finals, and you'll ride in the finals, and we'll start from here, and go places. You ridin' broncs, me a-ropin'. Kid—God bless you!"

He choked, suddenly. Turned. Sixty took hold of his arm.

"Come on and help me look over the cinches, for luck." Sixty's voice cracked a little, with eagerness and emotion.

They started toward chute four. Hi halted.

"Anson Bagwell's there," he said sharply. "There, see him? He's a chute-handler this year. No, kid, you go on. I'm in no shape to meet that bird right now. Won't do you a mite of good for me to go over there where he's around. Remember. Go on, kid; don't eat no dirt."

HI stood and watched Sixty Jones hurry along the single plank walk atop corral fences. There was a moment when Sixty was down examining straps at the cinch. Important. The whip and plunge of the bucking horse is lessened if shortened front cinch straps hold the saddle far forward; but that same whip and plunge is intensified beyond any chance of victory for the man if the rear cinch straps are pulled too short.

Sixty knew enough to look at the straps. Hi had hammered that into him.

Hi smiled a little, drew a second bottle from his pocket, drank deeply. He held it poised, grinned derisively at the liquor remaining, then in sudden fury smashed it on the pebbly ground.

"Goin' somewhere," he said a little thickly. "The kid and me—if he makes it. And if he doesn't, and I've gambled away my saddle, maybe I'm probably goin' to hell."

He climbed the corral fence. Wildcat crouched, shivering in the chute. Sixty was down in the saddle, testing stirrups.

"Keep eyes on chute four," thundered the announcer. "Something powerful coming from chute four."

There was a further moment of delay. Hi shook his head, trying to dispel the mental fog so he could see clearly. He saw.

And started in a pitching, swaying run along the plank walk atop the corral fence. He yelled; but the loudspeaker bellowed over him.

"Ready at chute four. Sixty Jones trying to ride the notorious Wildcat; the horse sired by a cyclone and damned by every rider. Sixty Jones on a real outlaw."

Hi saw the chute gate swing, the horse leap, while men yelled. He reached the arena side of the chutes and corrals; poised, an instant, before he jumped. And in that instant, he saw Bagwell grinning.

Then Hi Lowe flung himself. He jammed his way through the crowd.

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They blocked him. His straining ears heard the tight hush out in the arena, and that strange silence punched through with the squealing of a blood-mad bronc trying to pitch his man so hoofs could smash life from the rider.

By no miracle could Sixty Jones stay on to the gun. By no common miracle. Hi Lowe knew that.

He had to get out there, in the clear, ready to drag Sixty from under thrashing death. He might, if only he could get out there to do it. He might pull Sixty clear.

And after that—he'd get Bagwell.

CHAPTER II.

ARENA JINX.

ED ALDRICH, being head of the committee, was high boss on the grounds. He was a mighty hot and cranky official when he got through pacifying the two paid admissions that had tangled back of the grand stands. He drank a cold pop. That helped. Then he cantered over to where old Andy Wallace sat a big white mare near the roping chutes. Andy Wallace was good medicine for frayed nerves.

"If we get this day over without someone getting killed I'll sing the doxology," remarked Ed, mopping his brow. He was range-born but slightly plump from riding a swivel chair more than a Hambley tree.

Andy Wallace pursed his wide lips and squinted, until the old blue of his eyes almost disappeared. Pock marks on the old man's face didn't show up until one got close. Then they lent to his features a certain curious quality, like rough-faced granite. For the pitting was deep, and thick. They kept Andy Wallace from being both distinguished looking and handsome; and he didn't care two hoots, one way or another.

"It's the sort of a day when men lose their heads and beasts go mad," Andy suggested. There was a slight burr to his speech.

They sat several moments, as cow country men will sit, hands folded on pommels, tongues silent. Ed Aldrich studied the old range man. Ed always thought of Andy Wallace as a nigh perfect specimen of those men who had made the cow country. Tall, slow spoken, with fierce and unyielding dislikes and hatreds, with loyalties as unswerving, their pledged word better than any gold-edged bond, these men had fought winters, wolves, drought and rustlers, as they subdued the wild empires of the western plains and mountains.

Andy Wallace was something of a tradition in western rodeo arenas. Two decades past he had been a roper. It takes a man with sinew, bone, and guts to grab three thrashing legs of a thrown steer and make a hog-tie. Andy Wallace had possessed all those qualities.

Ed Aldrich, now graying at the temples, had been a stripling the day he had witnessed Andy's last roping. It was in this very arena. Andy's good loop had dropped fair. The slack had caught the big steer's hocks just where it should. The rope had swept feet from under the critter to neatly "bust" him. In that instant when rope is slack after the busting, and the next instant, when the horse must take out slack and keep the steer's neck stretched so he cannot get up before the man can go down the rope, the rider must make sure the steer's head is not doubled under.

Andy had looked to see that the

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steer's head was not under, and he realized his pony would have to take slack mighty quick or the steer would get up. So Andy roweled with his spurs.

NOBODY knew precisely everything that happened. One thing, the pony was not directly fore-and-aft. Andy, being a northern plains man, had his tie to the saddle hard-and-fast instead of loose dallied, as southern brush-poppers tie to the saddle. The hard-and-fast rope jerked tight, catching Andy as he sat half-seated, and the man was under as the horse fell.

The pommel did the dirty work. When surgeons got Andy opened up where the pommel had hit, they took out splinters of vertebræ and put in silver plates. They said he'd never ride again.

"Long as I breathe, I'll ride," said Andy Wallace.

"Maybe," said the medical man. "On gentle horses, maybe. But if you try to rope, or break horses, you're done."

Andy Wallace had climbed into the saddle the first day he was up and he had ridden, on gentle horses, almost every day since.

Barred from contesting, he had become a "critter contractor." He supplied, on blanket contract, saddle stock for arena officials, steers and calves for roping, outlaws for bucking, wild horses for bareback riders, Brahmas for the reckless who got five dollars for riding those long-horned devils. The Wallace ranch, on "Andy's Fork" of the Kettle, was home range for more animal stars of the rodeos than any other place.

Old Andy had two ambitions. One was to supply rodeo stock that made the contests real contests. The other ambition included his daughter, Dawn Wallace, and Hubbard, his son.

"They're the ranch's real thoroughbreds," Andy would say, proudly. "Some good stock on this ranch; but them kids are the top. They'll make an arena record or two, some day."

Ed Aldrich broke the silence between himself and the old man with a question.

"Why didn't you let Hub rope here this year?" he asked.

Andy grunted. It would have stopped further questions from any but a privileged friend.

"You let him rope in the contests at Lander and Belle Fourche," suggested Aldrich. "Kid told me he wanted to enter here and you wouldn't let him."

"That's correct."

Andy chewed his lip. He did that, with strong, white teeth, when he was slightly aroused. He stared across the short distance to the bucking chutes on the east side of the arena.

"You let Dawn ride your string in the cowgirl's relay," persisted Aldrich. "She's only two years older than Hub. I know, she's been the woman of the family ever since her mother passed on, but both of your kids are grown up; Hub's past twenty, and I can't figure why you didn't let him enter here."

"Guess there's the answer," rumbled Andy, nodding. Hi Lowe was just walking ahead of Sixty Jones through the gap in the fence at the bucking chutes.

"You referring to Lowe?" Aldrich watched the slightly slouching walk of the roper going through the fence gap.

"Yes. My boy might win." Andy chewed his lip again. "Might win, and get set-up about himself. Looks to me like the faster they go up, the

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swifter they may go down. That Mormon fellow is a good example. He's sure slipped the past two years."

"Lowe isn't Mormon," said Ed Aldrich. Andy turned in questioning, and Aldrich nodded confirmation. "Fact," he insisted. "Anse Bagwell, the fellow he had trouble with two years past—"

"I remember," grunted Andy. "Bagwell's a bum, too."

"Knowing that," said Aldrich, "why in hell did you hire him as an arena helper after we'd been able to shut him away from acting as judge this year?" Ed Aldrich had waited for an opening to ask that.

"I WAS short a man on my contract," said Andy. "I've always kept my contracts to the letter. Bagwell does know stock and things."

"Some things too well."

"Women. And maybe cards."

"Little arena tricks, too. He'd make a good judge if he didn't let personal things count." Aldrich spit between his teeth.

"Maybe you mean like Eva Lord being able to make Bagwell go loco." Andy turned to face Aldrich.

"Eva can do just that," replied Aldrich. "Bagwell's still sore at Lowe, not because of that fight, but because Eva was Lowe's girl friend that season. Eva always campaigns top-notchers. But she's Bagwell's girl friend right now and Anse, I believe, is still jealous of Lowe. Bagwell's even gone so far as to dig up this stuff about Lowe not being a real Mormon. Got it from a couple of men from Moab. Lowe's mother was Mormon, it seems. Lowe was her maiden name. His father was some wild renegade who stole her away, and homesteaded, here, somewhere in Wyoming. Kid's mother died, and his old man got killed some way. Her folks came to the funeral and took the boy to raise. They hated his father so they renamed the boy Hiram Lowe."

"What was his father's real name?" Andy Wallace was biting his lip fiercely.

Ed Aldrich did not notice. For a bronc began thrashing in the bucking chutes and Ed looked that way. When he turned back, Andy Wallace was looking to the far horizon, the short-grass hills out beyond the airport—the same old hills that always had rolled and tumbled lazily miles on miles; hills that had seen days when if one lived on this range, one fought relentlessly or went under.

"What was that you asked, Andy?" Aldrich said.

"What was Lowe's father's name?" This time Andy asked it without the quick, running edge of stampede in his voice.

"Bagwell didn't say; but he might know. Ask him. Say, you seem uneasy. Are you?"

"I am. Very uneasy," confessed Andy Wallace.

"It's the day," said Aldrich shortly. "I'm edgy as hell."

They both looked up as Dawn Wallace approached on a little blaze-faced mare.

One look at her pushed trouble aside. The day seemed immediately all right when she smiled.

She had the poise of a mature woman; the freshness of youth. Her eyes were blue, like old Andy's. And her brows were level, and soft brown, not range-seared and bushy like her father's. Proud chin, tanned skin that was flawless, a set to the jaw that declared a will of her own, and a figure nigh perfect. One couldn't say, truth-

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fully, that Dawn Wallace was pretty. But she was very good to look at. And the way she sat the saddle, you knew she had been reared a-horseback.

"CROSS-BAR wants Hub to hold our third horse in today's relay," Dawn said to Andy.

"Cross-bar Cameron always has peculiar ideas," growled Andy. "Cross-bar's job is to be a good horse wrangler and not try to run our race for us. Hub's holding the first horse. The getaway counts. Hub'll give you two lengths at the start."

"But Cross-bar's argument—" Dawn stopped, suddenly white. "Look," she breathed. "Look!" And the two men turned, and stared.

"Out of chute number four," bellowed the mighty voice of the announcer system. "Sixty Jones on the outlaw, Wildcat. Look't 'm come!"

"Kid's in trouble," burst out Aldrich. "Saddle slipped back on that first jump."

"His head's starting to whip," cried Andy Wallace. "That bronc's whipping the kid from hips to neck; kid's groggy. Why in Tophet doesn't he quit—"

"For God's sake!" burst out Aldrich. "He's half conscious right now. See how limp he whips. Still up, on the tenth jump, and—"

"He's going!" It was a wail from Dawn. "Look at Wildcat! Look, Dad! Wildcat! That boy's falling—and it's Wildcat!" There was a half-screaming note in her voice.

"Saddle — slipped." Aldrich was saying it to himself, and cursing, unnoticed by the others.

They all rode. Andy Wallace ahead. There was a quick-snarling tangle of death weaving fatefully there on the field.

A man down. A rawhide kid that wouldn't quit while he still held enough of his faculties to stay up. Sixty Jones, trying with all his heart and soul to ride to the gun. Desperately. So Hi Lowe and Sixty Jones could start on the up-road, partners, with the goal—

"The pick-up—won't make it!" It was a cry from Dawn. Then she realized her father was charging into this mess. "Dad," she shouted, "you can't—"

But Andy Wallace was cursing as though he prayed between clenched teeth, and driving spurs into the sides of his surprised mare.

A man was down in the arena, a man who was unconscious from saddle punishment before he hit the ground. A man-killer named Wildcat was upreared, squealing, pawing, ready to come down with forefeet beating the life out of the boy who had ridden so desperately, so futilely, because the saddle was back where no man could ride the whip and lunge of the outlaw.

Dawn heard the queer, strangled silence in the arena, but in it drummed mad-spurred hoofs as the pick-up man raced, as Aldrich and Andy and Dawn drove, head on, while Wildcat, red-eyed with fury, seemed to prance an instant before he plunged to stamp the life out of the crumpled body of Sixty Jones.

Dawn Wallace was jarred as her pony smashed into the outlaw. Her little racer had got there first. She was screaming the outlaw's name in that instant of collision, as though shouting would stop the wild horse.

SHE saw hoofs dropping; and in the flashing moment she saw a second man, a stumbling, lunging, slightly ragged figure, almost under the

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hoofs of the bronc, reaching, recklessly, to get hold of Sixty Jones.

Then hazy tangle and smash and uncertain but vicious motion. Dawn knew the outlaw had struck the man on the ground; one hoof, maybe two, before Wildcat had been knocked away, before the man who reached had got hands on Sixty Jones.

She felt the smash again as she and the pick-up man and Ed Aldrich all slammed into Wildcat, boxing him from more attack.

Then Aldrich got a tight snub on the hackamore, jerking Wildcat's ugly head to saddle pommel.

For a moment, Dawn sat nerveless and shaking. She was all drained out after that death-crammed instant. But the need of the rider who had been struck steadied her, and she piled off, ran, crouched, and then was acutely aware of the other who knelt beside Sixty Jones.

A man, who sobbed. It tore into the heart of Dawn Wallace; for when a man sobs, something around his heart is breaking.

"Kid," Hi Lowe was saying. "Sixty! Quick, say you're okay. Sixty, it's your pard, Hi. Kid, don't you understand? Listen!"

Sixty opened his eyes. He smiled; and there was blood on the smile. Blood from a gash on the kid's head.

"I tried—Hi." Sixty's voice was thin. "Tried. But the back cinch straps had been pulled too short. I think Bagwell slipped up and—"

The homely face of Sixty Jones twisted, suddenly. He shuddered. Then was still. Hi Lowe's voice stuck queerly in his throat. People were crowding now, and there was the sound of an ambulance bell.

For a moment, across the quiet form of Sixty Jones, Dawn Wallace looked into the eyes of Hi Lowe, and there was something there that twisted her own heart, until hurt was all through her.

A doctor came, saying, "Get back, get back, all of you," and he shoved Hi Lowe away. The doctor had just patched broken bones of two soldiers who had been under the upturned caisson, and he too was ragged with the temper of the day. But he felt, quickly, deftly, of the bloody head of the man on the ground.

Hi Lowe shoved a man aside, and bent over, asking a question.

"I can't say he'll live," snapped the surgeon. "Can't tell until he's X-rayed."

"I want to help; I've got to help," said Hi suddenly. "Doc, if there's any way I can help him—"

"There isn't," said the doctor shortly. "Even if you could, you're drunk." He had caught a full whiff of Hi Lowe's liquor-loaded breath. "Here, men," said the doctor to the two orderlies, "step on it. Get him on the litter and into the ambulance. Snap it up!"

Hi Lowe tried to get to the ambulance. But the crowd surged, the ambulance moved almost before the doors were closed; that threw more of the crowd back against him, and pushed him until he stood a moment beside Dawn Wallace.

"I'm going," said Hi Lowe, with a queer, tight breath, "to find Anse Bagwell—and *kill* him!"

Then he was gone, almost as Dawn reached, and said something. He was gone, and the crowd milled, and held her. But over heads she saw a man running, unsteadily, toward the bucking chutes.

Hi Lowe was on the run, and heading toward a toboggan ride to hell.

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CHAPTER III.

GOIN' PLUMB HAYWIRE.

"FIGHT! Fight!"

A man near the chutes howled it with crazy glee.

Ed Aldrich turned the outlaw over to the pick-up and slid from his horse. He began elbowing toward the center of the crowd where two figures were slugging and flailing. He almost trampled Dawn Wallace in the thick of the crowd.

"Who is it?" Aldrich demanded, putting the question to anyone who might answer.

"That fellow Lowe," said Dawn. "He said he was going to kill Anse Bagwell."

"He ought to," declared a straight-haired, dark-faced rider beside her. "Bagwell shortened back cinch straps on Wildcat."

"I'll crucify Lowe for fighting again in our arena," declared Aldrich, huskily. The day was a tjinx day; and this was the fourth fight. Ed jerked a bulldogger aside, and got hold of Lowe's swinging arm.

Others stacked in on the fighters, and they were smothered.

"He jumped me," declared Bagwell, blowing a red bubble. The blood was streaming from his nose. "That drunken bum's bent on beating the life out of me."

"I sure will when I get loose," said Hi Lowe truthfully. "I'll just beat the life out of you."

"Here, you," snapped Aldrich. "If that's the way you feel, you're going to visit our jail. You hear?"

Argument that was sulphurous broke and boiled. Some in the crowd took sides and got proddy, others jeered. Fighting bred fighting. Until Hi Lowe was sober, the place for him was behind jail bars. Too much liquor and a memory of Sixty Jones, battered and limp, made Hi ready to fight everything within reach. No reasoning, just mad.

"I've got to go to the police station," Andy Wallace said to Dawn, as the milling crowd dissolved. "You and Hub and Cross-bar can handle the relay all right if I don't get back in time."

Dawn's clear blue eyes searched her father's face. She did not remember any other time when Andy had quit the arena while events were in progress.

"Something about Bagwell and this Lowe I've got to run down," said Andy evasively.

"You're finding out if Bagwell really tightened the back cinch straps?" There was half accusal in Dawn's own voice. Cheating of man or animal wasn't in the Wallace creed.

"No," said Andy, looking away to the hills. "No, it's a heap more important than that; a whole lot." And he left her, standing, wondering, for she never had seen her father so upset; never had heard him say anything stood ahead of rigid fair play in the arena.

HI LOWE tried again for Bagwell at the police station. The wild streak that lay in Hi was stripped bare. He would lick the world, if he had to, in order to get his chance at Anse Bagwell. Hi couldn't remember, quite, just what the doctor had said, but someway it figured that Sixty was going to die; and if that was so, Bagwell was going to get his, too.

"Now ease down, ease down," ordered one of the officers. "Here, calm down and give the clerk your name."

"Hiram Lowe." It was a surly statement. Hi was keeping his eyes on Bag-

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well. And now Bagwell was grinning a little. For Bagwell saw Hi as the wreck of the man who once had stepped proudly in the presence of Eva Lord.

"That isn't his real name," said Bagwell nastily. "He's afraid to tell you his right name; afraid you'll check up and find his family's got a criminal record."

"Shut up!" burst out Hi Lowe, angrily.

"I'll not shut up," Bagwell countered hotly. "I'm telling your real name, you son-of-a-jailbird. Your old man was shot to death trying to escape the Wyoming prison, and your real name's Bruce Freeman!"

Eyes turned on Hi Lowe. His back was braced against the wall as though he had been thrown against it by a blow. He was a wild, ragged figure, eyes wide, with color drained from his face. Dried blood suddenly was dark against his pallor. When he shook off two men holding him, he flung them wide, and without seeming effort.

"Help!" yelped Bagwell in sudden fear. "Help, he's going to kill—"

The cry gurgled to silence. Bagwell's breath was locked in a throat clutched in Hi Lowe's taloned fingers.

A man with a clubbed gun, a special officer, hit, once, in sudden panic, and Bagwell breathed again.

"Throw that rodeo bum into solitary," said the officer on the desk.

Andy Wallace blocked them as they picked up Hi Lowe.

"I'm taking cards in this game," said Andy, and he spoke with more burr and roughness than usual. Aldrich stared. Pock marks were like white freckles on old Andy's face. "Sober Lowe up. I'm taking him under my wing." Andy stepped aside and they carried Hi into the next room.

Andy Wallace turned on Bagwell. The old man's face was all laced with wrinkles. He squinted.

"You're leaving town," he said, and began to peel money from a wallet. "Here's pay for the whole show, so you can leave Cheyenne."

"I'll leave like hell," said Bagwell.

ANDY stopped peeling bills, then began again, steadily. "You are leaving," the old man said, and his eyes were streaks of live blue under sunburned lashes. "Lowe isn't going to be locked in jail if I can prevent it. And if he's loose, and you're in town at the same time—"

"Do you hear that old fool, Aldrich?" blurted Bagwell. "Say, you going to stand for this cock-eyed business; this threatening?"

"Ed's standing for it," said Andy more softly. He turned on Aldrich. "If you don't," he said, "I swear there'll not be a head of stock in the arena when the show opens tomorrow."

"Look here, Andy, what's bit you?" demanded Aldrich. "You gone suddenly loco? Explain why—"

"I'll never explain!" Andy shouted it. "I'll never explain to nobody. You hear?" He caught himself, swayed, steadied. "Now," he went on, "Bagwell's leaving Cheyenne for the balance of the show and I'm taking charge of this man Lowe."

"I'll not leave, I tell you." Bagwell was vehement.

"You better," said Ed Aldrich. "If Andy wants Lowe paroled to him, he gets paroled." Ed didn't know why the wild play, or what was back of it, but he knew Andy Wallace and was ready to back him blind against a fellow like Bagwell showing aces.

"Of all the outrageous—" began Bagwell in bluster.

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"You're leaving," said Aldrich, and meant it. The boss of the Frontier show is almost a king in town during rodeo days.

"Lowe's come to," said a man who dripped water as he stuck his head in the door.

Andy Wallace tramped into the back room. "Get out," he said to the two men there, and then Andy closed the door.

Aldrich stood looking at the closed door, puzzled. Andy Wallace had a beautiful reputation for taking the bit in his teeth when he wanted to have his own way, but—what in hell—?

In the rear room, Hi Lowe looked up surlily. His sand-colored hair was wet, he looked torn, worn, and battered. A bum. Whisky-soaked, busted, barred now surely from tomorrow's roping, even if he had a saddle.

"What's on your mind?" he demanded of Andy. "You goin' to tell me Bagwell didn't snake up the back cinch straps on that bronc so Sixty'd be cheated?"

Andy disregarded the question. "Your name's Bruce Freeman?" said old Andy levelly.

"My name's Hiram Lowe."

"Your father's name was Bruce Freeman."

"What of it?" Hi said finally. "There's been enough mud slung on that name. Forget it. I'll go to hell under the name of Lowe!"

"You'll not; you're bracing up to be a man."

HI stood up, scowled, jerked up his worn overalls and jammed a loose shirt tail down inside. "You don't know," he said steadily. "Sixty Jones is dyin', I'm drunk, my saddle's in hock— What'll stop me from goin' plumb haywire?"

"I'll stop you."

"The hell. What's it to you, huh?"

"That's — my business." Andy sucked in a deep breath. "By God, if I have to break your cussed neck, I'm going to make you go decent."

Hi Lowe looked steadily. "Damn if you don't sound like you meant it." His gray eyes bored and clashed as they met old Andy's faded blue. "Nope," said Hi, finally, shaking his head. "Nope; nobody's able to do that. If Sixty Jones dies, there ain't nobody livin' who can save me. If that kid kicks the bucket, I'll go to the bottom of the pit." He sucked in a ragged breath, made an angry gesture with head and shoulders, then looked stolidly at Andy Wallace. "If that kid could live there might be a chance, but when he's gone, somethin' decent in me dies, and I'm skiddin' to the bottom—with nothin' that can stop me."

"Then," said Andy steadily, "I've got to see this Jones doesn't cash in."

Hi had half turned away. He whirled, impulsively.

"Lissen," he said, "if you mean that—"

"Mean it!" Andy's challenge was an explosion. A savage blare. His stout old legs were braced, but he swayed, as though caught by storm winds. "We'll have the best surgeon in Cheyenne. I'll get on the long distance; charter a plane and bring the best surgeon in Denver. I will! I'm blocking you, any way in my power, Jones included, from going to hell; as sure as God's in heaven, I'm blocking you from skidding to the bottom."

Hi Lowe took three little excited steps, whirled. He tramped, with shoulders humped a little, back to face old Andy Wallace. For a second they stood, measuring each other; two men with potentialities for big evil or cour-

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ageous crusading for better things. Slowly Hi Lowe's eyes filled; Sixty Jones was dying. But, maybe, here was another chance at life.

"Lissen here," said Hi roughly. "I thought you were just rawhiding me at first, but I guess you mean it. I don't know why; I don't care a damn right this minute. But, if you get someone who can fix up Sixty— Why, say—" He stopped suddenly, swore, raked a hard fist across his eyes. "You don't know why that kid rode like he did today, but I know." Hi caught his breath, and it shivered deep into him. "You get Sixty out of this, and if there's anything I can do for you, or your family, or your outfit—anything, and I don't care a good and glorious damn—"

"You better be sober before you make any pledges," said Andy quietly.

"I'm in my right mind." Hi Lowe was savage. "I don't know what's promptin' you in this, but with Sixty saved, I'm your man."

"It's a deal?" Andy stuck out his hand.

"I swear to God it's a deal," said Hi Lowe solemnly, and his hand was steady and firm as he met the press of Andy Wallace's lean, hairy paw.

It was a half-blind, gambling sort of a pact; neither knew fully what was in the back of the other's mind, what was in store. But each knew pledges had been made and that those pledges, however taken, would not be broken.

CHAPTER IV.

STORM MURDER.

THE burnished sun that swam in the brass-hazed sky wallowed down toward the craggy Snowies. The storm that had hung like an invisible threat began to marshal its forces for attack. A cloud shaped like a monstrous shelf fungus mushroomed above Jelm Mountain; and another bulged and grumbled over choppy granite ridges north of Sherman Hill. Before the sun sneaked below peaks of the Snowies the two clouds had fused, and drums of thunder were beating through them, like tom-toms booming hollowly through mists.

Those who had lingered in Frontier Park after the wild horse race had thrashed around the track began to hurry for shelter. For storm was coming, black, heavy and riotous.

With all battle ranks in parade, the storm delayed. The sky gods began building fabulous towers and domes of mystic castles that thrust into high air when fading day splashed them with tints of rosy coral. But the belly of the cloud was black, and through it ripped daggers of lightning, flashing like the swords of half-hidden duelists.

Still no wind, no rain. Dusk washed the plains with sable twilight, and lights were turned on in the houses. Through this twilight, racing, came the plane from Denver carrying two famous surgeons; while at the hospital, Cheyenne's best man of medicine made last minute preparations for the emergency operation.

Outside, the earth seemed breathless, waiting.

The same tight-breathing strain filled in the white-walled room where anxious men soon busied themselves in splicing together the parts of Sixty Jones that had been kicked to pieces by hoofs of that horse Wildcat.

Hi Lowe stood in the dim-lit hallway, or sat, or paced a little, impatiently. Andy Wallace, stony-faced, watched, and chewed his lip.

A strange reserve had suddenly

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thrust between them; as though each were measuring back over that impulsive agreement. And finding in it food for thought and conjecture. But neither spoke of it. The bargain was struck; and that was that.

"It's taking a long time," said Hi finally. The note of anxiety in his voice dug into old Andy a bit.

"Patience is something you younger fellows never have," he said after a moment. Thunder boomed nearer, and galloped away, then Andy said, "I know, for when I was younger I had the devil's own time learning to wait for things to work out. It's cost me hours of regret."

They were silent again; but the storm came now, and it tore at the eaves and sides of the little hospital with the ferocity of something wild. Lightning struck a power line. Lights in the hall dimmed, flickered, then came up, steadily. And they saw a surgeon in the doorway, and white-swathed things beyond. Andy and Hi stood silently as an orderly trundled whatever there was of Sixty Jones past, along the hall, into a room. Then Hi turned to the surgeon.

"He's got a fighting chance, that's all I can say," remarked the doctor. "Kid's as clean as a hound's tooth and if anything will help him make it, that will."

"When'll we know, doc?" Hi's voice was strained.

"Two, maybe three days; not before. Right now you best clear out, for there's nothing you can do here. Maybe, if he's in good condition, you can have a word with him tomorrow."

THE surgeon went on. Hi leaned against the wall. His eyes caught into the gaze of Andy Wallace. He sensed a queer, sudden hostility in the older man. Andy shook himself, angrily, as though in rough protest.

"I'm going out to Frontier Park," said Andy. "Stock's sure to be restless and I'm going to check up on what my boys are doing to keep 'em quieted."

Hi followed him down to the hospital porch.

"You got your car here?" Andy was curt. "All right, I've got mine. I'll see you tomorrow. Meanwhile, I figure you'll remember we've made a deal."

"It's a deal," insisted Hi steadily, but there was a sharp touch of antagonism in his voice, almost as a shadow of that which had been in Andy's remark. For Andy's tone was almost hostile.

The old man hunched his shoulders, tramped to the curb, drove his car away in the blearing flood of the night. Hi stood, watching the car dim out in the pouring rain. He lit a cigarette. He was stone sober now; had been since Andy Wallace had confronted him at the jail.

Couldn't figure it out. Didn't care whether he tried or not—until Sixty Jones was sure all right. And if Sixty made the grade, Andy Wallace would be the man to thank; and if Sixty made it, old Andy could give any orders he wanted.

Someone was running along the storm-splashed walk. He saw her in the spreading burst of lightning; then heard her; and saw her clearly as she half stumbled up the steps to the shelter of the porch. Dawn Wallace must have seen the glow of Hi's cigarette, for she came directly toward him, until he could see her drenched features and form under radiance shed by the porch light.

She stood panting, trying to calm quick breathing.

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Hi had seen Andy Wallace's girl some years back, when she was a pin-feather range kid, all legs and arms and big eyes. She had ridden a pinto in the trick-and-fancy contests. For two years past Hi had been allowed only in the short-grass shows, and the Wallaces had been only at the larger Association shows, so he had missed seeing her as she suddenly reached full womanhood.

He was surprised, now, to see how Dawn Wallace had become such a tall, willowy woman. The way the thin white dress was plastered to her didn't leave much to imagine, and the looks of her as she reached in quick impulse to brush wind-whipped hair from her face was something for a man to see.

"Where's my dad?" she asked, still fighting for breath.

"He's gone out to the park," said Hi. "I'll run you out in my old coop there if you've got to see him. Something important, maybe."

"It is important for him to not know about." She took a quick, short step to face Hi Lowe; reached a hand to his folded arms. "I came here looking for you."

THE rain beat against the walks with an angry hiss, a bomb of thunder burst and died, and Hi waited, wondering.

"If there's anythin' I can do—" he began.

"There is," she said quickly. "Cross-bar is busy out at the park; I've got to trust you; I can trust you. Someway, I realized that, when you were kneeling across from me, while Sixty Jones was stacked up on the ground—" Her voice caught. "I don't know—but I figure a man who's that staunch a friend to a kid like Sixty can be trusted."

"I guess," said Hi thinly. "What is it?"

"My brother. It's Hub." She stopped, and bit her lip in a way that was exactly like old Andy pulling down the right hand upper corner of his mouth. "He's drunk," she barely whispered. "I want you to help me to get him out of it before Dad finds out."

Hi looked suddenly into the night. Damn odd, very damn odd. Old Andy hell-bent on making Hi Lowe something beside a skinful of liquor, and Dawn Wallace coming to Hi to ask help in getting Hub sober.

"Where is the brother?" asked Hi after an instant.

"He came to the hotel; he was hitting it up then. Full of fight. Said if his father wouldn't let him rate a man in the arena and kept him out of the roping, he'd show Dad that he could hold more liquor than any Wallace ever did before. Hub was drunk, I tell you."

"Yeah, but where is he?"

"I'm not sure. He said something about going down below the Railroad Street. I couldn't go there alone. The other boys are out with the stock—and I felt I could trust you. We've got to get Hub straightened out and back in the hotel before Dad comes in!"

"Your old man's dead set against liquor." Hi put it as a half question.

"He's rabid," said Dawn. "I don't know—something back in early days. Dad used to drink. But something happened back there. He gets to fighting his head and roaring if any of our men brings liquor around Hub and me. I think he's afraid his old thirst may crop up again in us."

"All right," said Hi. "I guess this is part of a job I'm signed for. Let's get into the old car."

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It was a wreck of a machine that he drove, a relic of better days. But it still had power and pull, and he could draw his roping horse in a trailer hitched to the back. With all its groaning, it got places and returned. Hi pulled up in front of a bar where a tin-pan piano banged and couples jogged around the little floor.

"You better stay here," he suggested, but Dawn was beside him when he walked into the place. "Not here," said Hi after a quick look. "I'll ask a few questions."

He came back a moment later. His face was sober.

"Listen," he said shortly. "You're gettin' in my old hearse and goin' to the hotel. Yes, you are. I've got track of Hub, and I'm goin' after him. But you're not goin' into the place where he is."

SHE looked up sharply, a question in her blue eyes. Then understanding came, and he saw her quick concern.

"I'll drag him out of there," said Hi quietly, "if I have to break his fool neck. And I'll walk him in the rain until he's plumb sober. Now, you drive my car, git to your hotel room, and keep your old man thinkin' of somethin' else until I can get Hub presentable!"

They stood a moment, then he said, "There's a gun in the car pocket in case it'll make you feel safer. You know how to use it if necessary."

She nodded, asked no more questions. He knew she had put full responsibility for Hub in his hands, and Hi watched grimly as she drove, a little recklessly, back up into the business section. Then Hi went after Hub.

He found the kid. And Hub argued. So did Hi. So did some of the girls with Hub. As much by determined strength as anything else, Hi got young Wallace out on the walk. And he started him tramping.

Hub was tall, like Andy and Dawn, with a cupid's bow mouth where the other Wallaces had straight, level lips. And he had build too, like the others; a good frame and sound meat on it. Hi found that out as he dragged him by the next dance hall, for Hub wanted to start the carousing all over again.

They walked up streets into the drippy park in front of the Capitol, out toward the flashers that vainly tried to cut through at the airport, and then back, and around, and after a while Hub was walking without sulking, his head up, face to the rain, and several times when they were under storm-filmed arc lights, Hi saw the kid shake his head, restively, like a high-spirited horse.

"I guess I'm over it," said Hub after a time. It was near midnight, Hi figured. "Let's get to a restaurant and I'll down a couple slugs of tomato juice, and then I'll be all right." So they had tomato juice.

"I'm seein' you to the hotel," said Hi.

"You don't trust me," said Hub hotly.

"Why should I," said Hi, "after what you done tonight? Come on."

They walked again in silence. The rain had quit, now, but clouds covered stars. Hi tramped along as they entered the hotel.

"I'm goin' up," he said to Hub, "and if your old man wants a story, we'll give him one he can believe; about you comin' to the hospital to find him, and me startin' to drive out to the park where I was goin' to see about my ropin' pony, and you comin' along to find him, and then the car breakin' down

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and you and me workin' over it in the rain, then havin' to walk back. He'll like it better'n the truth."

"Nobody here," said Hub, after he had opened the bedroom occupied by himself and his father. "Come on in a minute; I'll call Dawn's room, and tell her the strayed lamb's home, safe and sound."

HI stepped inside the door, stood, slouching a little against the door frame. Hub called a room number. A telephone jingled just across the hall; Dawn's room. It rang, and rang again, insistently. Hub hung up. He hammered at Dawn's door; tried it; hammered again.

"She don't answer." Hub's voice was filled with quick concern.

"Maybe that's her," said Hi, as Hub's telephone began an insistent jangling.

"Yeah, this is Hub," said young Wallace, as he took the call. "Sure. What? What's that? Dead? The devil! I saw him just a minute ago; here in the hotel. I'll find him and tell him." Hub slammed up the receiver.

"Dawn?" Hi's voice was abruptly shaky.

"No, the old man. Calling from Frontier headquarters. Told me to find you and deliver a message." Hub stopped, shook his head as though his faculties were still a little cloudy. "Don't make sense," he said slowly. "Someway, it don't."

"Well, what the hell is it?" demanded Hi.

"Your car was found, smashed, mile west, on the Lincoln Highway; found by some tourists. Anse Bagwell's dead body was in it."

"Served him right if he stole the car and wrecked it."

"He wasn't behind the wheel," said Hub. "Bagwell had been plugged three times, through the heart, with a gun, fired close."

They stared at each other. Hub shook his head again. Hi turned slowly to look at the closed door to Dawn's silent room.

Then Hi Lowe started slowly down the hall.

"Here," said Hub, catching up and blocking him. "The old man said for you to get down to the rail yards, hop a freight to Rawlins, and strike out over the Red Desert trail to our home ranch. Says to tell you it's better to give this outfit time to cool off a little before you're brought in for questioning. I'll swear to where you were almost from the time you left the hospital."

"You'll keep your mouth shut." Hi Lowe's voice had dropped almost to a whisper, but Hub stepped back a pace. "You hear?" Hi took a threatening step after Hub.

Then he pivoted, and started hurrying along the hall.

"Here," said Hub, catching up once more. "The old man ordered—"

"To hell with his orders," said Hi roughly. "He don't know what I do. Hell with what he thinks."

"Then I'm going along and tell my story, and show how impossible it could be for you to—"

"You keep your damn mouth shut." Hi's brown hand got hold of Hub's shoulder and it dug hard into the youngster.

"Well, what in hell is the idea then? What you want to do?"

"Ain't what I want to do," said Hi slowly. "It's what I've got to do." He seemed to straighten, shoulders pulled back, and he appeared taller under the battered, rain-soaked hat. "Why," and he whispered, "I guess I'm goin' over

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and maybe confess to the murder of Anse Bagwell."

CHAPTER V.

"AND YOU'RE LYING!"

RAIN was pouring on Cheyenne. The rodeo crowds that had filled the streets earlier were all under cover. It was a wet night. Wind shook the big trees over Frontier Headquarters. Heavy drops that clung to leaves were tossed loose, and they sounded like running footsteps stampeding through the soft-treading, steady downpour.

Inside the secretary's office where the shades were drawn, Andy Wallace and Ed Aldrich sat across the golden oak table from Hi Lowe. One drop light flooded the table top, but failed to illuminate corners. Hub Wallace moved restlessly, like a shadow among shadows near the walls of the room. Hub was smoking one cigarette after another, and avoiding the eyes of everyone. Hi Lowe was telling a calm, logical story of a meeting that evening with Anse Bagwell, a quarrel, a shooting, and a run into the country to dispose of Bagwell's body, with that run ending in the wreck.

"And you're lying!" thundered old Andy suddenly.

Hi did not answer. He thoughtfully dug out rain-soaked cigarette papers and a cloth bag of damp tobacco. The only expression on his shadowed features was rank disgust as he thrust the useless papers and tobacco back into torn shirt pocket. Aldrich shoved over a package of tailor-mades and Hi took one, frowned at it, lit it slowly, while he scowled in thought. Then he raised his eyes, to squint steadily over first smoke to where old Andy sat screwed down in a heavy oak chair, chin almost on breast bone, hands clamped on the chair arms.

"There isn't one hole in that story," Hi said steadily. "If you think I'm lyin', prove it."

Old Andy snorted angrily. "I know when a man lies," he said.

"You're right," said Hub suddenly. "He's lying."

Hi jumped. His chair fell over. "Who told you to speak your piece?" he demanded angrily of Hub. "Didn't I tell you to keep your yap shut?" Hi had been calm as he confessed murder. All his tight-held tension now slapped at Hub like a released spring.

"Yeah; and I'm not keeping my yap shut." Hub thrust his head forward truculently.

Hi scowled and swore. "Isn't it enough," he said bitterly, "that they're sure at the sheriff's office I was the one who killed Bagwell, and that I admit it? Now you," and he turned to Hub, "stay out of this; let my story stand."

"You've been lying," said old Andy again. "Hub, what is the truth of this, if you know?"

"He daren't tell—" began Hi, a bit desperately.

"He's going to tell," stated Andy, bending across the table.

Hi Lowe felt the curious wash of hidden antagonism.

"What's your story, Hub?" asked Aldrich, and his controlled voice broke the straining moment.

"Speak up, son," commanded Andy.

"You let my story stand," ordered Hi sharply.

HUB braced himself; looked a moment at Hi; swung slowly, defiantly, to face Andy. In a low, edged voice, Hub started with Hi Lowe

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coming into the place below Railroad Street, because Dawn had asked Hi Lowe to find her brother and sober him, and then, after Hi had dragged him out, Hub told how the two of them had walked miles. Under no possible circumstances could Hiram Lowe have killed Anse Bagwell, then carried the dead body into that smash-up, as the car shattered against a bridge guard almost before the eyes of night-traveling tourists.

Andy's face got bleak as Hub confessed deliberately going on his spree. More than ever, the old man's features seemed hewn from rough granite.

"That all?" demanded Andy, as Hub stopped.

"Enough, ain't it?" asked Hub defiantly. "Yeah, that's all."

"It ain't," said Hi. "The real hell's somethin' you've got to hear now; all of you."

He stopped. He felt all husk, scooped out, beaten. He had watched Andy Wallace soak up hurt from Hub's story. The boy had a wild streak, and his father was fearful of that overtopping the good part of his son. It doesn't do any good to see a father torn by acts of his boy. What Hi must tell would hurt worse. But they'd forced the thing; it had to be told.

"Well, let's have it," rasped Andy.

"When I found Hub," said Hi, looking at the smoking cigarette stub pinched gingerly by thumb and finger, "I just told him I'd come amblin' down there 'cause Dawn had asked me to." Hi brooded a minute. "He didn't know, nobody knew, that she and I had driven down there together in my car, and when I found out just the sort of place I had to go into to get Hub, I sent Dawn back to the hotel—drivin' my car." He stopped again. "And," he said, almost to himself, "I thought I was wise when I told her in case she was molested, my gun was—in the pocket of the car. Maybe it was wise, maybe not." He was almost whispering.

"It—isn't so!" Andy Wallace swayed. Cross currents were ripping into him, and his voice was shaky. His wide mouth thinned to a tight line and he forgot to chew at his lip.

No one said anything. The wind outside sighed.

"Tourists reported they thought they'd seen a woman run away from the wrecked car," said Aldrich, and immediately wished he had not reminded them of this.

Hub reached impulsively for the telephone, gave the hotel number, and asked for Dawn's room. The other three strained to hear a voice in the receiver, but it only buzzed and burred. Dragging minutes seemed to pass, though only seconds slid by. Hub hung up. He looked stupidly at the telephone for a moment, and turned. His face was without color and strained.

"'S I remember," said Hi, almost to himself, "the sheriff's lookin' for me." He got up, stretched a little, hoisted his worn old overalls, and tucked in the loose shirt that had crept above the belt, back below the waist line. "I suppose," he said again softly, "it'll sure save a lot of grief if I were to go down there and give myself up."

THE three in the room saw him, slouching a little, a rough, slightly shambling man, passing through the door of the office. His steps were slow and studied as he crossed the dim-lit outer office. Then the street door slammed incisively.

Andy Wallace surged to his feet.

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"By the Eternal," said Andy throatily, "he can't make such a play and not have us backing him."

Hi Lowe stopped short in front of the dark *Tribune-Leader* office as he heard them, half running to catch up with him. Tomorrow the newspapers would be pouring out of the building with murder black in the headlines.

"We're going along," said Andy gruffly, as he reached Hi.

Their heads were down as they faced the dying storm. Andy plodded beside Lowe; Hub and Aldrich walked behind. There was approval in their silent march at his side, and Hi Lowe had a feeling that somehow he had a foot on the bottom rung of a long ladder which he must climb. Hi had felt the intoxicating lift of wild cheering that sweeps arenas, but nothing so eloquent in its way as the silence of these men who walked with him through the waning night.

They had to wait at the sheriff's office. Then the sheriff came, all upset and full of questioning. Hi told his story with more sureness this second time. It actually had the color of truth in it.

"Better get a signed statement of some kind, I guess," remarked the sheriff. "Fred, you fix one. We'll have this all buttoned up by the time the newspapers start to spread the story."

A deputy who had taken notes went into an adjoining office. The spasmodic click of keys was a nerve-racking sound. The tinkle of the old typewriter bell jangled in tones unnaturally loud. Those in the outer office moved about a little, with stealth and furtiveness. Hi Lowe sat humped, hat pulled low. Aldrich offered a cigarette, held a match for Hi, and then others smoked, and the room filled with gray streamers that writhed.

They heard the paper pulled from the machine. It was a rough, rachety sound. The deputy got up from the desk, stopped to light his pipe after the heavy labor of two-finger typing.

They heard him sucking gustily to get a draft going through the tobacco. And then that sound was covered by the tattoo of someone hurrying along the marble-floored hallway outside; one light tread, and with it, a second that was heavier. Not running fast, but tiptoeing hastily.

The deputy came from the back office. He stopped in the doorway, and stared. The outer door had been pushed open. Hi Lowe half got to his feet, then sat as though clubbed. Others were very still. For a moment sounds seemed frozen.

"This is the right place," said Dawn Wallace, turning to the other girl. "Come on in, Eva."

EVA LORD stood a moment in the doorway. She was a dark-eyed defiant girl who had been a follower of rodeos for a half dozen seasons. She was a little over-fleshed now, from indulgency.

"What's up?" demanded Aldrich; and the sheriff asked the question in the same breath.

"I've changed my mind," said Eva Lord, suddenly.

"You're going through with this," declared Dawn Wallace, and her lips tightened into a level line. "If you don't I will. Come inside."

A little dazed, Eva came in. Hi saw her clothes were rain-soaked.

"I'll give you one more chance to make your own clean breast of this," said Dawn steadily. "If you don't, I'll do it for you." She looked a lot like old Andy, standing with feet braced, her pliant body balanced slightly on

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her toes. The white dress was bedraggled now, but eyes passed over that and looked at the girls' contrasting faces.

There was hushed waiting. Eva's frightened eyes shifted as they looked around the room, then centered back on Dawn.

"Start where you saw me park Hi Lowe's car by the hotel, and tell how you took it, to go through the rain, and get Bagwell to go riding with you, so you could talk to him before he took the midnight train to Denver," prompted Dawn.

"It's a lie!" burst out Eva hysterically. "I haven't seen Anse Bagwell—"

"You're going to tell how, and why, you killed Anse Bagwell." Dawn's voice was hard, and low-pitched.

"It's all a lie," said Eva. "I loved Anse. I wouldn't kill anything. But when he said he was going to run out on me— Say, any of you," and she whirled in desperate, half angry declaration, "did you ever know of any man running out on me, and do you think I'd let Anse do it now, after he's responsible for me being in the condition I'm in. Oh,—I can't face this, I can't face—"

Eva pivoted, blindly, leaned against the wall near the door, and began to sob. Dawn stood, rigid. The others were like men will be when a woman sobs hysterically in the midst of males; held by awkwardness and uncertainty. Then Andy Wallace spoke to Dawn.

"Honey," he said, and his old voice was suddenly soft, "how was it you found that Eva did—"

"I've been over to her room for an hour trying to get her to come and tell what she'd done," cut in Dawn, sudden weariness in her voice. "I'd parked Lowe's car when I got back to the hotel, had gone up to my room, realized I'd not locked the ignition, so I went down, and saw Eva driving it away."

"Why not?" flared Eva, turning erratically. "I've had the use of that car often enough before when I wanted it, God knows." She looked tearfully at Hi, then turned to rest the side of her face against the bare wall. She sobbed dryly while she stared with unfocused eyes.

"You got Lowe's car mixed into this," said Dawn quietly, "but that's no fault of his." Dawn turned back, half toward Aldrich and the sheriff. "When she took the car, I went hunting for Hi Lowe and my brother so I could tell them; I knew they'd be walking the streets. I didn't find them. Then I heard the report of Bagwell's body being found in the wreck, and how they figured Hi had killed Anse because of what happened at the chutes today. I knew Eva Lord was guilty. So I went to her room and waited. She came after a while. I made her tell. And I brought her here."

SHE turned to Eva. All eyes centered on the sobbing girl.

"Don't you all stand there and look so damn righteous," flared Eva, turning fiercely. "You'd have done the same thing. I had to see Anse alone. Somewhere he couldn't walk out on me. That's why I took the car and got him in it and drove out past the airport. I asked him to marry me; told him why he had to. He got mad then. He was choking me; breaking my back over the steering wheel.

"I thought he was going to kill me. I remembered Hi always kept a gun in the side pocket of his car. I got it, and Anse was choking me, and it was self defense, 'cause he was killing me, and I loved Anse— But then he was sitting

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there, moaning, and then he was quiet 'cause he was dead, and I drove—I don't know where, and wrecked the car—and I don't care what you do to me—'cause I loved him!"

She started to cave, slowly, knees buckling under her, and Ed Aldrich, who was nearest, caught her and held her.

It was a moment held in odd uncertainty. Hi met the gaze of Dawn as she raised her head, and she smiled, tightly, ever so little. He knew, from the little gesture, and what she had said, that Dawn had realized how they would blame him, and how she had made sure that the truth would be told.

"Pretty plain," said the sheriff after a moment, "which of these two confessions is the real one. Can't use two prisoners, and I guess, Lowe, you can run along without being asked too much about what prompted you to confess a murder that Eva Lord committed. The papers'll have this tomorrow; but all they'll find out is that Eva came in here and confessed."

Hi met Dawn's gaze again, and knew that she had grasped what he had done; and why he had done it. Quick gratitude flashed into her eyes.

But he looked beyond, for an instant, to Andy Wallace, standing just back of Dawn.

There was such a flash of hatred in the old man's face it was like the searing white of lightning. Quick as lightning it passed.

CHAPTER VI.

ANDY COMMANDS.

CROSS-BAR CAMERON'S stubby fingers slid familiarly along the legs of Chugwater Cora. Hers were shapely thighs, roundmoulded and silky under his blunt hand. Cora was a beauty; lean in flank and well formed.

Cross-bar sang loudly the first three measures of "Jesus Savior Pilot Me," and gave Cora a friendly slap on the hip.

Snorty Jim apparently objected. He began kicking the partition to pieces. Cross-bar reared like a grizzly in a briar patch.

"You sorrel fool," he said loudly, "cut that out. What in hell's bit you?"

Snorty Jim quieted respectfully. Cross-bar again bent to feel Cora's legs, making sure there were no sore muscles that might slow the slim-legged mare as she ran her round of this afternoon's cowgirl relay. He had charge of Wallace's racing string, and he babied those horses something scandalous. But they won races, did Wallace's string.

Cross-bar abandoned the first hymn, and lustily attacked "What a Friend We Have." Cross-bar liked hymns; their long, sustained notes permitted a fellow to really get going. His singing was rough, like his ordinary talk and general appearance. Hack Nash, the bulldogger, claimed he never was wholly sure whether Cross-bar was singing or roaring in his throat, like bulls grunt as they talk up courage before beginning ruction. And Mel Myers, the rodeo clown, said it was like bagpipes with the croup. With such appreciation, Cross-bar sang whenever either of these critics was near. Both now were loafing just outside the stable door, so he sang.

Cross-bar, Hack Nash and Mel Myers were part of Andy Wallace's permanent crew hired to work the rodeo stock, both at the home ranch and in the arena. Other temporary arena hands were hired locally. A fourth

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member of this home ranch group was Buttercup, the trained mule that assisted Mel Myers in the business of getting laughs.

Buttercup was a loud-braying, sassy-mannered lady jackass, a range orphan, that Mel had picked up, brought to the home ranch, and in spare time had developed into a first-class rodeo attraction. Whenever Andy Wallace got put out by the practical jesting of his human stock, he declared that Buttercup packed more sense than the remainder of the outfit.

Cross-bar was a thick-chested, half-old little man, who always entered every rodeo contest in which he might qualify. He never had quite reached high money. But his hunger for just one championship never had faded. His game leg was the result of setting his own broken bones after a horse had fallen on him some years back while he was line-riding from a lonely camp north of Sleepy Cat; three missing fingers had been uprooted by a snarled lariat that had a cantankerous long yearling fast in the loop end; and his jokes were musty and venerable; but everyone laughed so they might see Cross-bar's round little eyes dance and his eyebrows jig.

One forgot the general effect of shiftless cowboy dress produced by buttons missing or unmended snags when Cross-bar told one of his smooth-mouth jokes, shook his tangled iron-gray head, and slapped his knee as he doubled with laughter over his own funning.

HACK NASH was a right smart bulldogger, so he went in for clothes; particularly big, light-colored hats that made Hack look like a prodigious toadstool with a big-barreled stem, and two stout, round legs to trot it around. A jester at heart, Hack loved to chaff Cross-bar and Mel Myers; but got broody when jokes were on him. When tables turned, he smiled again.

Mel Myers was skinny, thin in body, face and voice. He was as soft-hearted and easy-going as the others, but Mel had a way of drawling nasally, while his eyes were sleepy, and he said things that would blister the hair off a terrapin. Whenever Cross-bar sang around the bunk-house, Mel dragged out a gourdy-toned fiddle and sawed out "Redwing," or "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland."

Mel stamped industriously in time with the tune's rhythm; he had to go into action all over to get music out of his system. Hack never appreciated the bull-voice singing or the acrobatic fiddling, so he usually sat on bunk or bunk-house step and made coyote noises. He would tip back his big round head which joined into a heavy neck, close his eyes, and howl dismally.

Mel had taught Buttercup, the mule, to join the party at this point, and bray. So, all things considered, this was a right friendly and understanding quartette, even if they didn't achieve harmony.

Turning away from Chugwater Cora's stall, Cross-bar hitched to the stable door, tilted his rusty, battered hat back, and smacked his lips. Hack Nash squatted with back against the outside wall, scowling as he cleaned his fingernails with a stock knife. Mel Myers had one shoulder hooked against the ship-lap stable, as though he must permanently brace the building. Both certainly had heard Cross-bar singing the hymns.

"*'Have we trials and temptations,*

"*'Burdened with a load of care—'*" began Cross-bar.

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"We have all three," broke in Hack Nash. "Quit that yowlin' or I'll be so jumpy I'll be likely to cut off a finger."

"If you're a Christian at heart," said Mel softly to Cross-bar, "you'll not disturb Hack."

"I thought," said Cross-bar, "he was goin' to plant taters under his fingernails, an' now he's diggin' up them fields."

"He's got a new idee," drawled Mel. "Hack figgers this is free land he's workin', so come he gits enough dug out to make a quarter section, he's stakin' his claim to homestead it."

HACK NASH wiped the knife on his overalls disgustedly.

"Don't try so hard to be so funny," he said. "You'll cast a show. What we've got to do is get to our knitting. We've got a real question before the house, so you, Mel, don't trot out that string-halt humor of yours, an' you, Cross-bar, don't sing—or even try to."

"Nobody's ever said it was singin'," mused Mel pensively. "But I've always wondered if it was meant to be."

"If I was a prairie dog, I'd chew on you both thinkin' you was smartweed," said Cross-bar. "Now let's get serious; let's talk like Hack says."

"Talk won't fix things," remarked Hack soberly. "When Andy Wallace's got torment of some kind workin' inside his hide, talk won't fix things." Hack peeled thready wood from a match stem.

"Whenever Andy looks across the short grass country like he has today, as though he almost expected someone to ride in from yonder, it means he's bad bothered," agreed Cross-bar.

"There's a part of Andy Wallace," observed Mel, "that he keeps hid, deep-like, and when trouble gets into that, an' gets yeasty, it ferments, like cider in a jug." Mel crimped the end of a brown cigarette thoughtfully, paused, looked toward grassy hills just beyond Cheyenne's boundaries, then raked the match to life. All three knew Andy well enough to know the truth of what Mel had just said.

"That expectin'-somebody look was in Andy's eyes most of the time when first I come to Kettle River to work for him," said Cross-bar moodily. "It's been kinda faded out last few years, but it's back now. Once, when I was full of sass an' salt, an' we was settin' on the kitchen porch at the home ranch, an' Andy was lookin' with eyes all squinted, off, southwest-like, toward the Blue Cliffs waterhole an' the 2 B Joined range, I asked the old man what was gnawin' on him. I did it as smooth as butter, an' meek as water in canned milk." Cross-bar stopped. He never gave either of this pair voluntary information. Always, he forced them to ask for it.

"What'd he say?" inquired Mel, after seconds had dragged. Mel and Hack took turns putting the question and it was Mel's time to speak.

"I ain't never asked him no personal thing like that since," replied Cross-bar. "I learned my lesson young."

"Lowe's mixed into this," volunteered Hack Nash.

"I said that first," remarked Mel. "Figured Andy felt so obligated to that bum he just up and hired him to work in our outfit, an' now Andy's worryin' about havin' this no-account rodeo tramp on his hands."

"We may have to take a hand in handlin' Lowe if he starts pilin' up grief on Andy," mused Cross-bar.

"When Hub told you about all the happenin's last night, Cross-bar, did the kid say maybe that was why Andy

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hired Lowe as sorta reward, like?" Mel squinted. "I'll bet that's just it."

"With Andy griped from tail bone to eye-teeth because he feels he's obliged to do it," supplemented Hack. "The old man hates rodeo folks that go in for such hell-raisin' as Lowe has."

"Maybe that's it," agreed Cross-bar, "but I'd rather Injun-wrassel a buzz-saw than to put the question direct to the old man."

"Well, this Lowe is part of our outfit now, 'spite of his bein' the most elegant gutter-bum in the arena circuits," said Mel.

"HE'LL probably try to shine up to Dawn like he's done to some of the other rodeo women," growled Cross-bar abruptly.

"I've watched that Mormon roper gallin' around a good many arenas," said Mel sagely, "an' I'll bet five to one he'll go for Dawn Wallace."

"Once Lowe gets his mouth set to trap a squaw," observed Cross-bar, "he goes at it earnest an' enthusiastic, like a dog diggin' fleas."

"I'll turn plumb poison if he goes la-de-dahin' around Dawn," burst out Hack Nash darkly. "The boozy bum!"

"Our Mr. Nash loves the boss's daughter," almost whispered Mel.

Hack spun up to his stocky height, and turned on Mel hotly. "You damn know it," he flared. "So does Mel Myers, an' Cross-bar Cameron, an' her brother Hub—an' all the rest of us. Sure I love Dawn Wallace. Who wouldn't love her—like we all do? But you know this Hi Lowe's record? Hi can't hooraw Dawn. I won't stand for it! Sometimes, Mel, you're damn near comical you're so funny!"

Hack Nash tramped stumpily away, his beefy shoulders all humped and fight-hungry under his big hat.

"You got deep under his hide," said Cross-bar Cameron after Hack was out of hearing.

"You know damn well you and I both feel the same way he does about Dawn Wallace," accused Mel Myers.

"Wonder what Hack'll say when he learns this Lowe is holdin' second horse for her in this afternoon's relay," drawled Cross-bar.

"He is?" Mel's sleepy eyes opened, and he stared. Cross-bar nodded. "Why in hell—?" Mel questioned. Neither knew the answer.

Hi Lowe also questioned why he had been asked to hold pony in the relay. He had found no wholly satisfying answer by the time he stood beside Dawn Wallace that afternoon, just before the relay started.

"I'm wonderin'," said Hi, looking at Dawn, "why your father put me here."

"I asked him to," said Dawn directly. She looked steadily at Hi, meeting his gaze with a slight, friendly smile. "I trust you more than ever since last night. We owe you a lot."

Her straight gaze made Hi Lowe feel suddenly very soiled and stained by life. Not outwardly, for he wore the best clothes he could muster. They still had a degree of quality and style about them, and were rigorously clean. But he felt the need of inward renovating, somehow.

"You Wallaces don't owe me a thing," he said, and looked over the arena. Crowds were around, but they were quite by themselves for the moment, in the middle of the throng. "I may have to work all my life to pay off the debt to your old man for what he done for Sixty Jones."

"How is Sixty this afternoon?" Dawn's voice was touched with real anxiety as she shifted the subject.

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"I'm not a bit sure," he said slowly. "I went up to the hospital about six o'clock this mornin', an' the place wasn't open, and I went back again a couple of times later, but couldn't see him, and I've telephoned several times too, and all they say is he's bad off."

"Dad told me something of your agreeing to straighten up and be somebody since Sixty's going to get well. He's hired you, hasn't he, on the strength of your promise?"

HE looked over the crowds and nodded. His face seemed touched with tiredness, and a bit older, as though he looked toward the continuation of a fight in which he already was very weary.

"Even—if Sixty doesn't—make it," said Dawn, and her hand reached out to rest on his arm, "you'll be able to straighten up."

"There ain't nobody else who understands," he spoke roughly. "Sixty does; he savvys. He knows my fight, and he helps me. But if the kid doesn't make it, I'll most certainly go to hell too—in my own sweet way. I'll not ask you all to bother with me if Sixty don't make it."

He got busy with his fingers, testing cinches on Chugwater Cora. Dawn stood for a moment, quite straight, her independent chin up, and her blue eyes flashing back of half-closed lids; a sight like Andy Wallace, she was, as she stood. She even bit her lip just like the old man. And then she shrugged a little, turned.

Perhaps he was right. A man who could not fight his own battles might not be worth the effort involved; all over the Association circuit she had heard what a bum he had become since he'd been barred from the roping in Association contests.

"Come on, let's get the relay going," said a track judge, riding up. "Time for the cowgirls' relay."

The race started; Dawn riding up among those in front. As she came hurtling in, to change to Chugwater Cora, Hi Lowe felt the brush of Dawn's taut muscles, the touch of her hand an instant, and then she was away—to ride into a snarl that was close to a foul, that wasn't a foul, but just a jam caused by peppery horses half out of control. During the third circuit, on Snorty Jim, Dawn worked up to third, but a blaze-faced gelding that was a running scamp took first, a fleet-hoofed black second.

"I'm sorry," said Hi. "Maybe if I'd been up on my toes, you'd got away on Cora before that mix-up."

Dawn turned on him with a quick, decisive gesture. She started to say something that was edged and shaped to cut. Then bit her lip, quickly; and smiled slightly, slowly, while her eyes stayed earnest and searching.

"It's the Wallace creed to play the game hard, just as hard as we can, each doing our best," she said quietly. "If we don't win, it isn't because we haven't done our best. We all did this afternoon, you included. You can't blame yourself or anyone if you play the game that way, hard, and don't win."

She pivoted away, and walked, rather hurriedly, toward the stables. Hi Lowe felt the accusal, the soft lash, in what she had said.

"Oh, hell!" he said entirely to himself. "Hell, what's a girl like her know about war?"

OLD ANDY WALLACE and Cross-bar Cameron had watched this, but were out of earshot.

"She's got him talkin' to hisself al-

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ready," said Cross-bar meaningly. "He can't stand the rowels."

Andy Wallace said nothing; but his lips tightened. He glanced toward Dawn.

"We've got all the crew we can take along to Monte Vista," said Andy. "We can't take time or trouble to ride herd on Lowe. So I'm leaving both him and this Jones kid in Cheyenne. Soon's Jones is fit to travel, they'll report to the home ranch.

"You've lost out in contests you've entered here?" Andy made it half question, half statement. Cross-bar nodded. "All right; I want you to take my roadster and start for Andy's Fork right away, so's you can get back by the end of the show."

"Hell-on-Tuesday," said Cross-bar. "That means I'll miss all the finals in ropin' an' buckin', Andy."

"Somebody'll win, and the others lose for once, without you being here," remarked Andy. "I want you to run out to the ranch and tell Steve Capps these two wild ones are coming in on him." Steve Capps was the man in charge of the home place while the others were at rodeos.

"Gosh, you could write or wire him if that's all."

"It isn't all." Andy chewed his lip a little feverishly. "You're to tell Steve to put Lowe to work. Keep him busy, out of mischief. Jones probably'll have to take it easy for quite a spell. But Lowe can rope and ride well enough to make a good hand."

"I'll tell Steve they're comin' an' to put Lowe to ridin'," affirmed Cross-bar, watching Andy's lip-chewing. There was a pause, a dragging one.

"Yes," Andy agreed, after looking over toward the short-grass hills, "but you tell Steve that if he makes the mistake of letting Lowe ride over toward the Blue Cliffs waterhole, and the 2 B Joined range—" Andy stopped, his eyes narrowed, and he stood as though he had forgotten Cross-bar and the unfinished message.

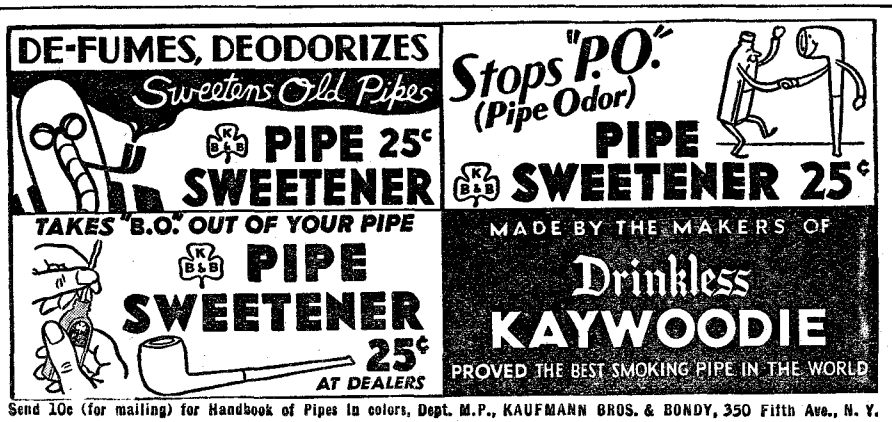
"Well," said Cross-bar, finally, "if Lowe does go on a high-lonesome or somethin' an' rides to Blue Cliffs springs, for instance—"

"If that happens I'll skin Steve Capps alive," said Andy, and meant it. Cross-bar knew he meant it, just that way, for Cross-bar was looking into the cold blaze of Andy Wallace's eyes.

Cross-bar managed a solemn nod, and kept his expression from changing.

"That's all plain language, and you can remember it," said Andy. "And," he warned, "keep mum about it."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



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WONDERS OF THE WORLD

HADRIAN'S WALL

"BRITAIN'S ANCIENT FRONTIER DEFENSE"

WHEN Hadrian became Roman emperor in 117 A.D., he was determined to put an end to the raids of the barbarians who were continually harassing the Roman garrisons in South Britain. So he devised an elaborate defense: a wall twenty feet high and eight feet thick to stretch for seventy-three miles up hill and down dale, across the entire width of the island. At mile intervals were forts armed with catapults, with smaller watch towers between and a path along the top patrolled by guards.

The forts were well protected by double stone enclosures, with thick, wooden, iron-bound doors opening into paved courts, where the ruts of chariot wheels, as in Pompeii, were deeply grooved. There were systematic streets of barracks heated from stone flues, for the recruits from the Continent were unused to the bitter British winters. There were storehouses, granaries, offices; also heated baths for the commandants in their private quarters, which were decorated with carved stone and painted plaster.

This amazingly detailed system was completed only after ten years of labor, and for centuries it protected the British frontier against barbarian onslaughts.

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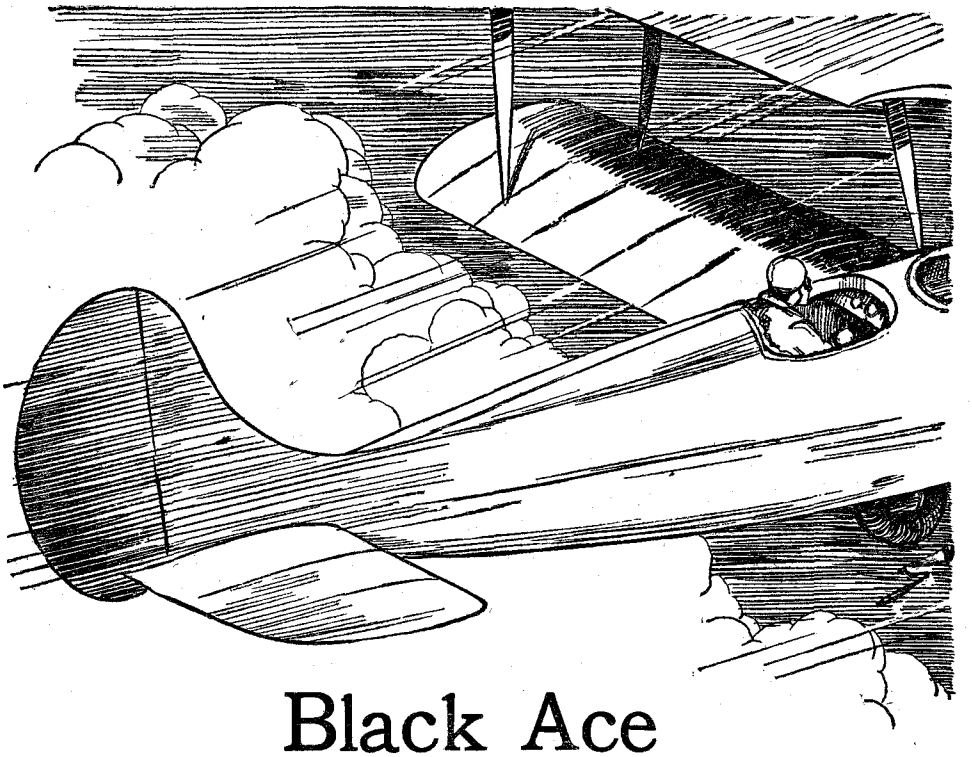

Black Ace

By GEORGE BRUCE

Author of "Stand By to Crash," "Thar She Blows," etc.

Enemy air-bombers were suddenly striking at Ethiopia—so Jeff Rolfe, foolhardy pilot, flew rings of panic around their planes

CHAPTER I.

PILOT COURAGEOUS.

JEFFERSON ROLFE was black. And because he was black the world lost a Clive, a Stanley or a Lindbergh. Those men were white, but, with the exception of a differently pigmented skin, they possessed nothing which Jeff Rolfe did not possess in equal measure.

People have laughed at the mention of Jeff Rolfe's name. People ignorant of the forces which churned within the man's soul, ignorant of the white-hot flame burning within him which even ridicule could not quench. People who saw him laughed at him, until those people looked at his eyes. After that they found nothing humorous connected with Rolfe, and the laughter gave way to a desire to weep. To weep over this soul of a lion confined and condemned to pace restlessly within the inescapable cage of a black skin. Black skin made a cage, because Jeff Rolfe

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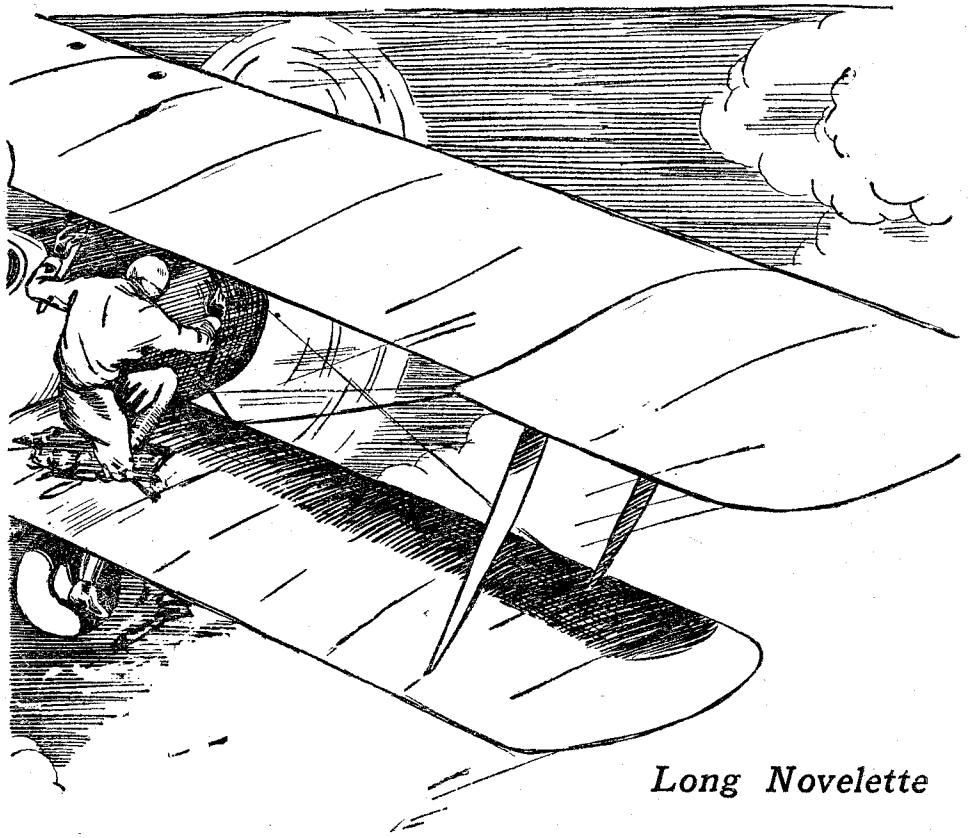

Long Novelette

Rolfe was struggling to free himself

had the misfortune to be born into a white man's world, in which only white men can be heroes or heroic, and in which only white men can be leaders—and in which white men zealously guard those prerogatives.

Jeff Rolfe had a way of making his entrances and exits like a bolt of lightning striking out of storm clouds. He had "color" and a natural sense of the dramatic. Throughout his life the world was his stage, the sky a melodrama, and he was the Star. He was the Star of his show, and the spotlight was always full on him.

Rolfe made his first public appearance during the early days of aviation. The World Famous Ace Flying Circus served as his medium of introduction, when the Ace Flying Circus was the Number One attraction of the world.

The Circus was made up of a group of war pilots who had become burdened with the heavy boredom of peace-time existence after the hectic period of the World War. They were men who found peace-time flying and living insufferable after years during which the skinny hand of death rested lightly but continuously upon their shoulders.

They were the greatest of the American pilots. Their names are written large in the Golden Book of American aviation.

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In the days when the Ace Flying Circus was organized ninety-five per cent of the population of the United States had never seen an airplane. There were no flying fields. No strip maps. No beacon-lighted airways. No instruments such as are employed in flying of today. If a man was a *pilot* he proved it on his body. The men who could fly, lived. The men who could not fly, killed themselves. In those days the survival of the fittest in the game of flying was more sharply emphasized than in any other human endeavor.

The war, with its Richtofens, Rickenbackers, Collishaws, Nungessers, Foncks, Udets and Lukes, had inflamed the popular fancy. Those men, because they were publicized, were outstanding among the figures of the World War. They were the romance, the knights in shining armor of that conflict.

The other fighters were merely poor, mud-covered, lice-infested grubs, burrowing into the earth to protect battered and shivering bodies against extermination. But the war pilots—war correspondents made young gods of them. Governments plastered them with decorations. Kings and Emperors received them and delighted in showering honors upon them. They were the Olympians until the armistice was signed. Then they were the Lucifers, tumbled out of the heavens by a satiated war god.

But their exploits lived even after the armistice was signed. And the populations, regaled over a span of years with stories of those exploits—fact and fable—still thrilled to the glory and to the romance of flight.

The Ace Flying Circus was conceived and dedicated to that romance, and to the desire of the populace to witness the young war gods performing in the space above home cities.

From cow pasture to cow pasture, from Oregon to Florida and from Maine to Mexico, the red ships of the Circus appeared and disappeared over those cities like swift birds of passage, always leaving behind the *ooohs* and *aaahs* of the spectators. Always leaving behind jumping nerves and pulses dynamited by the daredeviltry and shockingly dangerous exhibitions which was the circus stock in trade. Always leaving behind the staccato echo of Hisso motors and the scream and whine of flying wires cutting through atmosphere.

THE track of the Circus became an avenue of triumph. The newspapers of the country abandoned front pages with a whoop of welcome. Staid dailies, during the time the Circus spent in the cities of their circulation, took on the appearance and used the adjectives of circus one-sheets. Store windows and telegraph poles for miles around were plastered with the hair-raising pictures of the Circus in action. Such names as "Diavalo," "Bullet Drop," and "Upside Down" became household words overnight, where the Circus passed.

The publicity was cumulative. Its added weight made each appearance greater than the last. The sky over a hundred cities was torn by the rush of wings.

At the height of its renown, at the height of its dazzling success, the Ace Flying Circus came one day to Birmingham, in the State of Alabama. Came to stage a three-day show under the auspices of the Birmingham *Advertiser* and the Chamber of Commerce. And it was in Birmingham that the men of the Circus saw Jeff Rolfe for the first time.

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It began with a "throw-away" which an excited colored boy pushed into the hand of Ken Morey, who ran the Circus. Ken had an explosive nature. He was about five ten, and his head was covered with a stiff reddish bristle. He had a pugnacious, florid face, with deep-set gray-blue eyes, a pug nose and a fighter's dogged chin.

The Ace Flying Circus was the pride of his life. He ate, drank, slept and talked Circus. Nothing ever interfered with Circus in Ken Morey's life. Neither would he brook competition of any nature. He was the General Manager, the Chief Announcer, the Master of Ceremonies, and the slave driver of the outfit. The pilots of the Circus hated his guts—and would have died for him.

Morey glanced at the badly-printed dodger which had been thrust into his hand. It was covered with a black smear of ink which attempted to be a face surmounted by a queer-looking helmet. There was the suggestion of a uniform tunic—a very startling tunic. There were black words, soggy on the cheap newsprint paper.

JEFFERSON ROLFE

World's Greatest Negro Ace

In a sensational exhibition of stunt flying, wing-walking, aerobatics and death-defying, breath-snatching aerial exploits, including a

PARACHUTE JUMP!

Fair Grounds, September 4th.

BIRMINGHAM'S GREATEST THRILL.

Ken Morey glanced up from the announcement. Every telegraph, phone, power and light pole in sight was decorated with the brilliant colored posters announcing the World Famous Flying Circus. His circus—his posters. And those posters likewise shrieked a date, "September 4th."

Morey's little, button-like nose turned a deep red. "Why, damn him! Trying to cut in on *our* billing! Trying to steal *our* date! I ought to go over there and snatch his head off. Who in the hell is he—this Rolfe, anyway?"

Jack Early, the Ace of the Circus pilots, happened to be walking with Morey at the moment.

"Search me!" he declared. "Never heard of the cluck. He sure has a crust running a one-man show against *us!*"

"Show, hell!" boomed Morey. "We're showing here tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. There won't be any competition!"

Early grinned all over his face. "I'd like to see the guy work—at that," he confessed. "World's Greatest Negro Ace! There ought to be a bang in that."

MOREY stopped on the street and stared at the handbill. "Say, there's an idea there! Look! We can turn competition into a still bigger publicity smash for us. This Rolfe must be a home boy. None of us ever heard of him, and we know everybody flying a jalope in the country."

His eyes were sparkling. "There must be a million Negroes in Birmingham—and they've got money. I'm going to get smart. I'm going to invite this 'Black Ace' to show with us, get it? It's a natural for the papers here. 'Local Boy to Appear under the Auspices of the World Famous Ace Flying Circus!' We'll have every colored person in Birmingham and a mile around who can walk, ride or crawl out at the

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field to see this Rolfe do his stuff. These local angles are always great stuff. They go over big!"

"Like that guy in Peoria who wanted to jump a chute and then changed his mind—up in the air in front of forty thousand people?" reminded Early.

"I'm going to get in touch with this Rolfe guy. He'll fall all over himself to be the big attraction in our show." Morey ignored the Peoria incident entirely.

Ten minutes later Morey was sending a grease monkey to locate Jefferson Rolfe—to bring him to the hotel. It took fifteen minutes to find Rolfe. No one could miss him.

When he came he was at the head of three or four hundred colored citizens of Birmingham. They trooped along behind him as the Israelites must have trooped after Moses into the Promised Land. It was necessary to look at Jefferson Rolfe two or three times to be sure that this was not a trick of vision caused by delirium tremens. Once having seen him, no one would ever forget him. There was only one Jeff Rolfe in the world.

He came into the lobby of the hotel after imperiously lifting his hand in a halt signal to the followers. He was wrapped in a tremendous unsmiling dignity. It was the dignity of an African chieftain in a battered plug hat, spats and a G-string. But no tribal chieftain ever arrayed himself as Rolfe was arrayed. It was breath-taking.

He was tall—all of six feet. He was saddle-colored. He had burning black eyes flecked with yellow high lights. His face was acutely intelligent. His nose was thin and sensitive, and his mouth was a thin, straight line.

On his head he had, for a flying helmet, a football headguard, gilded until it was like a golden dome. His torso was covered with a plum-colored silk shirt, on which the tremulous hand of some dusky belle had embroidered an eagle in black silk. He wore riding trousers of black broadcloth, evidently home tailored out of the winter coat of that same dusky belle. He wore riding boots, gilded to match the splendor of the golden helmet. A pair of very cheap goggles were suspended around his neck by the head band, and flopped against his chest with each step.

The men of the Circus, particularly Ken Morey, stood there, silent, open-mouthed, and incredulous.

The multi-colored apparition said: "I, sir, am Jefferson Rolfe. I am given to understand that you wish to consult me on matters of importance?"

THE men of the Ace Flying Circus mentally clutched for the nearest support. Only one place in the world could produce that accent. Oxford! That and the outfit he was wearing would have staggered any gathering.

Morey's face was a brick red. He knew he had to get Rolfe out of the lobby. Already a mob was trying to storm the front door of the hotel. Morey shook hands and glanced around hurriedly. "Come on upstairs where we can talk," he commanded.

They went up on the elevator. Morey took him into his room and closed the door. Then Morey's demeanor underwent a sudden change. He became a bulldog. His chin jutted. His eyes flashed.

"Now!" he demanded. "Just what in the hell is the big idea of chiseling in on our publicity? Where in the hell do you get that stuff?"

Rolfe never batted an eye. Usually, when Morey stormed, people came to a halt and waited for the storm to pass.

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But Rolfe seemed completely unconscious of any disturbance.

"I'm sure I don't understand," he replied in that Oxford accent, and with a graceful gesture of both hands. "*You* really are intruding upon me, you know. I live here. I have been on the verge of giving this exhibition for a long time. It is unfortunate that we should choose the same day."

"Unfortunate for *you*," Morey barked. "Listen! Nobody ever competes with the Ace Flying Circus, on a date. Get that? You so much as crank a motor while we're in town—and see what happens!"

"But—my public!" insisted Rolfe. "I could hardly postpone my own show now. Not after the public declaration that I intend to fly. I should be glad, as a matter of simple courtesy and of simple hospitality, to step aside for you under any other condition. But—now—I'm honor bound, sir. I have stated that I will perform at a certain time. I must fulfill my obligations."

"Your honor won't hurt you half as much as a broken neck," growled Morey. "I'm giving you fair warning. You try to fly your crate while we're the main attraction here and I'll have Barrel Roll Early run the wheels of his ship over your top wing *while you're flying*. Understand? We're giving this show! And we're not taking any chance of having it ruined by some idiot with funny ideas."

Rolfe's face was impassive. "I shall have to fly," he said simply. "If you wish to have one of your men run wheels over my wings I shall try to prevent him." He stood erect.

MOREY felt a little twinge of conscience. Under his granite-rough exterior, Ken Morey had a child's heart and a tremendous sympathy. After all, it *was* Rolfe's town and he had to live in Birmingham. He had a right to his own home town. The Ace Circus was appearing for just one week-end—and, besides, there was the publicity angle.

He whirled on Rolfe suddenly. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he shot at him, stabbing at the same time with a forefinger aimed at Rolfe's chest. "I'll give you a chance to put on a real show! How would you like to appear as the *featured* attraction of the Ace Flying Circus during our show here? How would you like to fly off *our* field—with my boys? We'll spread it in the papers. If you can fly, if you've got a thrill for the people of this city, we'll see that you'll put on a show that'll knock 'em cold!"

Rolfe stood starkly, staring at Morey. The little yellow flecks were dancing in his eyes.

"But—you can't mean it," he said, almost in a whisper.

"You're damned tootin' I mean it! We'll make you the big shot in all our publicity for the next three days. We'll give you a build-up like you've never had and can never get. JEFFERSON ROLFE, WORLD'S ONLY NEGRO ACE, APPEARING WITH THE WORLD FAMOUS ACE FLYING CIRCUS! Just like that! All over the front page of the *Advertiser* and every other newspaper in town."

Jefferson Rolfe took a deep breath. "I am honored. I am more than glad, sir, to abandon my own plans, and to accept your most generous offer."

"Well, fly your crate over to our field in the morning," instructed Morey. "Get it over there just about daylight. We'll take care of it for you. The gas, oil and food is on the Circus during our stay. And, if we have a couple of good days and you do your stuff, you'll be cut in for a share of the

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take. If you're really good, I may carry you with us all through the South. How does that sound?"

Rolfe's eyes glowed. "I've been hoping that one day such an opportunity would come to me. Not for myself—but just to prove that men of my race can fly."

Morey chewed on his cigar. "Okay. It's settled. I'll give the dope to the papers. Now—just what are you going to do? What kind of a show will you give your public? I've got to know something about it to pass on to the papers."

Rolfe made a gesture with both arms. "I will be guided entirely by you. You have more experience in such matters. Whatever you say—I will do."

Morey nodded. "How about ten or fifteen minutes of stunt flying, and then, and to wind up the show—to give it the big bang ending—we'll let you do wing walking and a chute jump. Boy, by tomorrow night you'll be the biggest man in Birmingham!"

Rolfe shook his head. "But I do not wish to attract attention from your own wonderful pilots and performers! After all, *they* are the greatest in the world, and I am only — Jefferson Rolfe."

"You let me handle that," grinned Morey. "My boys can look after their own laurels. Now get out of here and let me work on this newspaper stuff. But get that crate of yours over to our field *early*. By the way, what kind of a ship is it?"

"It's a—a—" began Rolfe.

But Morey was already reaching for the telephone. "Never mind. Anything with wings and a motor is okay with me—"

"Good night, sir," said Rolfe.

"S'long," tossed back Morey. "I'll see you in the morning."

The door closed. The purple and gold and black apparition disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

STUNT FLYING.

THAT September 4th was a day unique in the annals of the World Famous Ace Flying Circus. It opened as many other days had greeted the outfit, beautiful, cloudless, and with a gentle breeze to temper the heat.

It had the feel of a carnival day. A showman knows that feeling. It is in the laughter and greeting of the people on the streets, in the ringing of street car bells, and the purr of motors along the streets and the manner of honking horns.

Ken Morey came down to breakfast at eight in the morning. He went out on the street and sniffed at the air.

"This is our day, gang," he told the men of the Circus. "The shekels will roll into the bag—and wassail will be made tonight. Did you see the papers? Are they going for that Black Ace angle? Look out that window! See those packages under the arms of those colored boys and girls. That's lunch, my friends. They're going out to the field—to *stay!* Let's go—let's go! Get that chow down and get out to the field!"

Morey led them out to the cars after the breakfast had been gulped. The cars belonged to the Circus—flaming red things looking like a fire department. He led the motorcade through the main streets of Birmingham. Nothing like being a showman—all the time. The siren on the red Lincoln which Morey drove moaned and wailed, until it came to the field on the outskirts of the city.

Morey supervised the parking of the

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cars. Then he glanced around. "Where in the hell is that Rolfe guy?" he demanded of Early. "I told him to be here at daybreak. I expected to see his jalope sitting on the field. What the hell?"

Early shrugged expressively. As if to state, without words, that if Jefferson Rolfe never arrived it would be too soon.

"Look at that gang!" demanded Morey. "It's only nine thirty in the morning and the field is lousy with people! And we aren't scheduled to turn a prop until noon!" His arm swept in a circle about the roped off field. The men looked.

They saw people standing, sitting, squatting. People in rows and ranks and banks. Already the rows behind the restraining ropes were twenty deep. Every little rise of ground, every vantage point was thickly clustered with spectators.

There was a sudden clamor of horns on the road leading into the field, and a sudden shouting which was not cheering. The boy on guard at the gate looked inquiringly at Morey. There was a big black Packard twelve cylinder limousine demanding entrance to the inner field.

Morey opened his mouth. He got as far as: "You can't come in here—" and then stopped very suddenly. In the rear seat of the limousine his eyes caught the glitter and sheen of a gold helmet and the flare of a purple-plum-colored silk shirt. Behind the limousine were half a hundred other cars.

A sudden, quick grin flashed over Morey's face. He could appreciate the "front" of a master showman. Jefferson Rolfe had arrived!

"Let the first car in, turn the others back!" he commanded the keeper of the gate.

The Packard rolled grandly onto the field. The colored chauffeur sprang out and threw open the rear door of the Packard.

And Jefferson Rolfe stepped out onto the field as a conqueror might have stepped down from his chariot. He turned his head slowly right and left, and surveyed the field and the twelve blood-red airplanes of the circus. He nodded his head, as if everything met with his approval.

Morey stalked over to him. "Say—" he began.

"Good morning," said Jeff Rolfe. "A most beautiful day."

Morey's hand clutched Rolfe's arm and his fingers dug themselves into the flesh under the silk shirt.

"Don't gimme that stuff!" he said in a low, ominous voice. "What the hell do you mean by coming to the field in that hack? I told you to fly over here early this morning. Where the hell is your crate?"

ROLFE hesitated for an instant. "I went to the field this morning, but there was something wrong with the motor. I worked over it for an hour or more—but it would not fire. So—I had a friend of mine drive me to the field. I trust that the failure of my motor will not interfere with the plans we made."

Morey cursed under his breath. "Nothing ever interferes with this outfit! We put on the show—and we never miss. Rain, fire, flood or famine—the show goes on and the Ace Circus flies. It's tough about your ship. A man likes to fly his own crate. But we'll fix that. We'll go farther—you'll do your stuff in one of *our* planes. One of those beautiful red babies on the line."

Rolfe beamed happily. "Have you instructions for me—what shall I do?"

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Morey looked at him. He grinned again. "Listen, you just—circulate! Understand? Keep walking around the field. Let people look at you. You're the featured attraction today—it's your innings. I'll let you know in plenty of time for your part of the exhibition. Right now we have to go to work." He nodded to the ticket men and to the men with the megaphones.

"Hi! Hi!" yelled the ticket sellers. "You haven't lived if you haven't flown! Take a trip through the skies with the World's Master Birdmen! The thrill of a lifetime, folks, brought to your front doors by the World Famous Ace Flying Circus! See Birmingham from the air! Pick out your own street and your own house. Hi! Hi! Hurry! You may be too late!"

There was the sudden machine gun staccato of turning motors in the noses of the blood-red ships. The blast of the slipstream over the grass and the drum of wind against wings and wires. One after the other the red ships turned, with pilots gunning the motors as they taxied toward the loading space.

The great show was on. The red ships leaped off the green grass of the field, circled, landed, one after the other—did it all over again, and the blare and chatter of motors was not silenced for a moment.

The charge for a flight was ten dollars per passenger. Each ship carried two passengers on each hop. The hops were two minutes in duration. At the end of the first ten minutes waiting passengers were lined up eight abreast for a hundred yards or more, and the ticket sellers were scribbling new tickets as fast as they could collect money and make change. Morey promptly forgot Jefferson Rolfe.

At noon the "take" had amounted to five thousand dollars, and a sudden silence settled over the field. Noon was the time for the "great free exhibition over the heart of the city."

The ships were refueled. The grimy faced pilots snatched time for a cigarette or a bottle of pop. They were grinning under the thick layers of dust over faces.

They climbed into the ships again—took off in formation, and raised hell over the heart of the city.

They came back, to carry more and more passengers. With the coming of the afternoon the roads leading out of the city were choked with cars coming to the field. All Birmingham—more—half of Alabama, was coming to give welcome to the Ace Flying Circus.

Ken Morey lifted his hand and signaled the ships to the ground.

"Get ready with the show. Get it over with! Make it fast and good! And let's get back to carrying passengers!"

SUDDENLY he remembered Jefferson Rolfe. He looked about. He saw Rolfe sitting in the cockpit of a red ship, fiddling with the controls, examining fittings. And about him was clustered admiringly the colored population of Birmingham.

"Hey, Rolfe!" roared Morey. "Get ready! We're going to let you lead off the exhibition with some flying. I'll send one of the boys to give you a crank. You all set?"

Rolfe waved a languid hand.

A grease monkey came over and took his position in front of the propeller.

"Switch off?" he demanded tentatively.

Rolfe's Oxford accent answered sharply and brusquely. "Switch is off!"

"Choke?" asked the monkey.

"Choke open," assured Rolfe.

The monkey threw the prop through

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three or four turns. Stopped, mopped his forehead with a grimy sleeve, spat on the ground and tested his footing.

"Close choke!"

"Choke closed!" boomed Rolfe.

There was a dramatic hush. The monkey reached up with both hands and took a grip on the blade of the prop. Suddenly he barked the word:

"Contact!"

Rolfe's voice answered him, cool and crisp:

"Contact!"

The muscles in the monkey's back and shoulders and arms set themselves. His body whipped, his arms dragged the prop down and around. It lunged through the compression point. There was the bark of a firing cylinder. Then the steady rhythm of the motor, hitting in order. The red ship vibrated gently.

Ken Morey nodded his head in satisfaction. "Rolfe knows what he's doing in a cockpit," he told Early. "He's as cool as a cucumber. I was listening for nervousness in his voice or something, but he never bobbled once."

He yelled at a group of grease monkeys. "Hey! Tail that ship around for Rolfe."

The monkeys picked up the tail of the red crate, carried it around until the nose was pointing down field, into the wind.

"Okay," yelled Morey, over the thump of the warming motor. "It's all yours. It's your show! Take it away!"

For a moment Jeff Rolfe glanced at the colored crowd behind him. Then he slipped the funny goggles down over his eyes, hunched forward in the cockpit, and gunned the motor.

FLAME leaped from the short stacks. The ship moved forward slowly, then rapidly. Morey watched, a little tightness in his chest—the tightness in the chest of every man who flies or who watches flying, at the minute of the take-off.

Faster and faster raced the red ship. Its tail came up off the ground. It was leveled off, straining to get into the air.

Morey said: "He's building up plenty of flying speed. He must be going to chandelle off the ground."

Suddenly the red ship's nose veered to the right. It yawed sharply. The yaw was checked by the quick application of left rudder. It swung to the left more sharply than it had yawed to the right. There was a little, sobbing sigh from the spectators.

Ken Morey's hands clenched themselves into hard fists and his jaws snapped together.

The red ship weaved drunkenly. It lifted its wheels off the ground in a crabbing motion, slipped in its forward motion. Then suddenly it lost flying speed, settled the dozen or more feet it had lifted, bounced hard on the ground, crow-hopped a hundred yards and crashed through a rail fence at the far end of the field.

There was the rending sound of shattered metal and wood. The wings collapsed into tangled masses of splintery wreckage. A great cloud of dust arose from under the sliding fuselage of the plane. For a second there was awed silence. Then the "crash wagon" screamed. The two cars took off over the field in second gear, racing to reach the spot with a dozen men of the Circus clinging to running boards, sides and doors.

Morey was driving the red Lincoln like a madman. He brought it to a halt with a screaming of brakes and threw himself into the dust storm from the wreck. He was waiting for the ship to burn. He was waiting for horror.

And then, out of the column of dust

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walked Jefferson Rolfe. There was a rip in the proud purple of his silk shirt. His black riding trousers were smeared with dust and oil. His golden helmet was knocked askew on his head. There was a running smear of blood across his face, where a center section strut had left its imprint.

"It's quite all right," he said with a wave of the hand. "It's nothing—a mere minor mishap—"

Morey's throat moved as if the rush of words choked him. His hands beat the air impotently.

"It's all right, huh?" He stood in the middle of the storm of dust, looking at the complete ruin of one red ship. "It's all right, huh?" He turned, facing the men of the Circus. "This guy washes out Eddie's ship and then tells me it's *all right!*" He went blue in the face, and his clenched hands waved above his head.

"The right wheel struck a rut or something," explained Rolfe. "I tried to get the ship in the air to straighten it out, but it stalled—"

Morey moaned, staring at the wreck. Then he remembered the mass of people. Riots, frenzied rushes were born out of much less.

"Get that mess cleaned up," he yelled to the grease monkeys. "The rest of you guys pile in the cars and come on back. We've got a show to put on—and we have to hold that mob!"

A CORDON of police battled with the crowd, to keep the field clear. Morey swept in front of the line. He leaped from the Lincoln. He lifted his megaphone.

"It's nothing, my friends!" he shouted. "Just one of those things that happen every day in the life of a circus pilot. Rolfe is not hurt. See for yourselves!"

Jefferson Rolfe paraded in front of the crowd. He waved his hands. He lifted them over his colored brethren as if demanding silence.

"The show will go on!" Morey was shouting. "Watch!" Out of the corner of his mouth he snapped an order to Eddie Grimes.

"Get flying! Give these people something to look at—you and Jack! That Number One plane change, make it worth watching until I get things straightened out!"

Jefferson Rolfe inserted himself in the exact center of the picture.

"But—I'm not hurt!" he protested. "I want to go on with the show. A minor accident—nothing—really."

Morey whirled on him. "You mean—go on, right now?"

"Certainly."

Morey snatched at Grimes' arm. "Hold it!" he snapped. "Never mind the plane change. Rolfe is going to do his wing walking show. Get him in the front seat of your crate. Snap into it now—get flying! Let Rolfe do his stuff!"

Rolfe climbed into Grimes' ship. He settled himself in the front seat. The Harden chute apparatus was already attached to Grimes' ship. "Bullet Drop" Hansen always did his jump with Eddie Grimes as a pilot. Rolfe pushed the trailing chute harness into a corner of the cockpit. Grimes opened the throttle.

The second red ship skimmed over the field, took the air, climbed in smooth wide spirals until it was at seven hundred feet.

Morey barked through the megaphone: "The sensation of the century! Watch closely, ladies and gentlemen. You will see him out on the wings—you will see him perform on the speeding, fragile structure of a flying air-

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plane. Jefferson Rolfe—the featured attraction of the World Famous Ace Flying Circus!"

Overhead, Eddie Grimes throttled his ship to bare flying speed. The chattering drone of the motor seemed stilled by the drama of the instant.

Then there was a shout from the crowd. The purple-shirted, golden-helmeted Jefferson Rolfe stood up in the front cockpit of Grimes' ship, waved his hand in full view of the fifty thousand or more people below, and stepped out of the cockpit—through the lower wing! He sank through the ribs and up to his hips. His legs dangled from the under surface of the wing.

Grimes fought to keep the Standard flying. The right wing, with the lower a sagging wreck, dragged hard against the controls. The added weight of Rolfe's body caused the right side to grow lead heavy. Grimes opened the throttle in spite of the danger of tearing the crippled wing to bits. Little by little he lifted the right wing before the ship could stall into a spin.

THE crowd moaned in an ecstasy of fear. They could see those long, golden-booted legs hanging like twin pendulums. They could see the upper part of Rolfe's body above the top surface of the lower wing. He was struggling to free himself—to pull himself out of the wreckage about him. And his struggles merely created more and more wreckage.

Grimes thrust his head toward Rolfe and yelled something—something harsh and sulphurous. Then he throttled the motor.

Rolfe's arms were reaching for the inner bay cross-brace wires. His hands went up, fingers clawing an inch at a time. He hooked the ends of his fingers over the wires. His body came up a matter of inches. He took a new hold with his hands. Then he heaved powerfully upward and his body came out of the jagged area into which it was plunged. Came clear, and, swinging like a monkey, he reached the side of the fuselage, sprawled over it, half fell, half collapsed into the cockpit.

Sudden waves of hysterical laughter swept over the crowd. People were screaming starkly, laughing insanely, blank-eyed, and with tear-wet cheeks. Laughing at Rolfe with his glittering raiment torn to shreds, his boots half torn from his legs, his golden helmet pushed back on his head like a mammy's sunbonnet. The slip stream had ripped his purple shirt to tatters.

Eddie Grimes was fighting to keep the crippled ship flying—fighting to maneuver it for a landing. Ken Morey watched, his arms folded and resting on the front door of the red Lincoln. Now and then he buried his face in his arms, his body shaking with rage and despair and relief. For once in his life he was speechless.

He had his head down when there was a sudden yelping shriek from the crowd. His head went up so swiftly that the verterbræ in his neck snapped. He had an instant glimpse of sprawling arms and legs overhead—of a ball of white silk tumbling after the sprawling figure. Then the ball of white opened into a parachute—so close to the ground that it seemed on the heads of the spectators.

Morey groaned. "A parachute jump at five hundred feet!" The sudden moan of the crash wagon's siren cut through the strangling, gurgling noises from the crowd.

And at the same instant, like a falling plummet, Jefferson Rolfe, with the parachute just billowing to its full ef-

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ficiency, landed directly on the necks of a score or more of his colored brethren in the center of the crowd.

There was a vast commotion among the colored spectators. After a moment or two Jefferson Rolfe emerged from the commotion, stalking forward, the chute rolled up in his arms, the stays trailing after him and tripping him with each step.

Morey howled: "I'm going nuts—raving nuts. Listen! I ought to run your legs down to stumps. I ought to murder you in cold blood. Two ships you've washed out! You—the Great Negro Ace! *Ace*—but nobody spells it that way!"

GRIMES landed his crippled ship. The right lower was sagging, broken in half. It collapsed as it touched the ground. Grimes crawled out and lit a cigarette. His hands were shaking and his face was white.

"What an act!" he said hoarsely.

"What the hell do *you* mean, making a guy jump at five hundred feet?" stormed Morey. "I thought you had better sense. I don't blame you for getting sore. But murder is murder . . ."

"Make who do *what?*" growled Grimes.

"Make Rolfe jump with that chute—"

"*Make hell!*" snapped Grimes. "That was his own idea. I had my hands full trying to keep that crate flying. I didn't have time to watch that Rolfe guy. When I got wise to what he was doing he had the harness fastened on him. He got up out of the seat and stepped overboard. I didn't have anything to do with him going."

Morey stared. "You mean—he had guts enough to jump—after that—after that wing business?"

"He jumped, didn't he?"

Morey threw one look at Jefferson Rolfe. Then he turned away. For the next hour he drove the Ace Flying Circus, snarled at the pilots and at the performers. He was boiling within himself. But he choked down the boiling. The show had to go on. The show that only the Ace Flying Circus could give.

Ship after ship went off the earth in a smear of streaking red; ripped through space above the crowds. Men crossed from wing to wing on those ships, and changed from plane to plane. Men did handstands on the top wings. "Diavalo" put on the greatest individual performance the world had ever seen. Jack Early and Pete Harmon, wing to wing, stunted until the crowd was weak from watching and blind from the flaming sun. The drone of motors was ceaseless.

Amid the uproar and the cheering which followed the climax and end of the exhibition, Jefferson Rolfe was completely forgotten by Ken Morey, by the men of the Circus—and by even the thousands of colored brethren on the field.

That day the Circus carried ten thousand dollars' worth of passengers. The red ships flew until darkness covered the field. And when night came there still was a line, four abreast, two hundred yards long, waiting to "ride through the air with the World's Master Birdmen."

CHAPTER III.

"GROUND SHY."

KEN MOREY was at peace with the world that night. He felt drowsy after a perfect dinner. The jitters were gone. The events of

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the afternoon were dissipating themselves into a hazy background. Now and then the unpleasant memory of two cracked ships surged forward out of that haze, but without sufficient force to stir him from his lethargy.

The floor of his room was strewn with newspapers. Black headlines and thrilling action pictures stared up at him.

BIRMINGHAM WITNESSES ITS GREATEST THRILL! ACE FLYING CIRCUS STUNS CITY! SEVENTY THOUSAND WITNESS SPECTACULAR EXHIBITION OF DAREDEVILTRY IN MID-AIR!

Ken Morey could always get a kick out of circus publicity—even when he wrote it himself.

And then, the "take," including the refreshment stands, had been close to twelve thousand dollars.

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. There came a knock at the door. He did not open his eyes. He merely said, "Come in."

The door opened slowly and Jeff Rolfe slipped into the room. His once proud raiment was in tatters. The golden helmet was gouged and the gilt was rubbed off in great spots. He had salvaged some of the purple shirt. The trousers were within inches of being no trousers. He stood in the center of the room, his hands hanging inertly at his sides, his eyes fixed on Ken Morey's face. There was a deep laceration from his forehead to his chin.

Morey opened his eyes slowly. Then he came bolt upright on the bed as if propelled by heavy springs.

"You?" he shrieked. "You!" And the great peace which had descended upon him was shattered and blasted.

"I," said Jefferson Rolfe. "The man who failed you—" The sonorous voice was laden with infinite sorrow.

"You got a hell of a crust coming here!" stormed Morey. "I figured you'd be across the nearest State line before I could get my hands on you—"

"Run away? Me?" Jefferson Rolfe shook his head. It was more expressive than any statement.

Morey relaxed a trifle on the bed. "Listen," he told Rolfe. "Suppose you cut out the posing. You're talking to a guy who has forgotten more about flying than you'll ever learn. You had a good story when you first told it, and I went for it. You took me over—plenty, but that's in the past. You gave the people out there a great kick, even if you did nearly break your neck. So—the hell with it. But come clean now. You never flew an airplane for ten minutes in your life, did you? You never had a minute's actual instruction in flying?" He stared straight at Rolfe's eyes.

And Rolfe returned the stare. "Not a minute in my life," he admitted. There was a little break in his voice.

"And you never were out on the wing of an airplane in your life—on the ground or in the air—were you?"

"Never." Rolfe answered in the same beaten voice.

"And you never made a parachute jump in your life?"

"No—until this afternoon."

Morey fell back on the bed. "Well—that beats me. I wouldn't even draw to fill a hand to tie that one. You're nuts, Rolfe! You're the champion liar and supreme fourflusher of the universe. Nobody is even *near* you!"

Rolfe was silent. He stood there, looking at Morey. In his eyes was the light of pure torture.

"What in hell is the big idea, then?" snapped Morey. "You—having those handbills printed, knowing that you

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had no ship, and couldn't fly. You—announcing an exhibition you knew you couldn't put on!"

ROLFE's voice was quiet. "I was sure—when you saw the handbills—you'd invite me to appear with your Circus—"

"You were willing to let me kill people, wreck my ships? And you were willing to break your own silly neck? For what?"

"Because—I thought there *was* such a thing as a *natural* flier. One who could fly without instruction. I studied the controls—how to move them. I can sit here in a chair and show you all the movements made by the stick and rudder to perform any bit of flying. I thought—perhaps, if I had a chance—I could fly—"

He stopped suddenly and swallowed hard. "I couldn't," he said. His voice trailed away to a whisper.

Morey looked at him. Just looked. The anger was drained from him. There was only amazement, perplexity, remaining. He reached for a cigarette. Rolfe's voice went on, but the eyes were still dead looking:

"I didn't run away. I couldn't run away. You don't understand. Everything I want in the world is here. You have it. I'd do anything in my power to earn a share in it. I know I caused you a loss. Very well, if you will permit, I will work to repay you for that loss—"

"You're as crazy as hell," snorted Morey. "You better get flying out of your bonnet and go to work somewhere."

"But—I've *got* to fly!" begged Rolfe. "I feel it—it keeps driving me. I have a *star,* Mr. Morey. It beckons to me. It is leading me—somewhere. Some day I shall be a leader among my people. They will look up to Jefferson Rolfe—and they will know that he has led them out of a wilderness—that he has given them glory and courage—and the will to try—"

Something stabbed Morey in the chest. Perhaps it was the memory of his own dreams, of his own hunger to fly at his first sight of a plane. Perhaps it was nothing more than the crooning sound of Rolfe's deep voice, and that queer, compelling light in the man's eyes.

Morey spoke abruptly. "So, you want to stay with us, eh?"

"More than anything in the world!"

"Would you be willing to dive in grease, carry water, scrub the slime off the bellies of the ships, rassle gas drums, run errands—"

"Anything."

"Okay," grunted Morey. "I don't know why—but I'm going to give you a job. Got any money?"

ROLFE looked surprised as if money was an unmentionable something, but he shook his head.

"Here's ten bucks," said Morey, going to the dresser, pulling open a drawer, and taking a ten from among three or four hundred other bills. "You get yourself a pair of khaki overalls, some shoes, a room and something to eat. You be at the field at seven in the morning—and never mind the Packard limousine to bring you to work. You come wearing those overalls, get it? No lily of the valley stuff from now on. The *Great Negro Ace* is grounded!"

"Yes, sir."

"That's all."

"Good night, sir—and thank you."

When he was gone Ken Morey reached for the telephone on his bedside table and called Jack Early's room.

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"Want a laugh?" he asked when Jack answered the phone. "I just gave Rolfe a job with the Circus!"

He waited for Early's explosive reaction, and got it. He laughed and interrupted. "Wait—listen! I'm going to teach that guy to fly. Wait, now! Sure—I know—it's just another manifestation of the well known Morey brand of insanity. But that boy has *guts*. Anybody who is willing to risk his neck, without batting an eye, trying to fly an airplane without a minute's instruction, has something on the ball. And when that same guy is willing to walk out on a wing and *try* to do stunts, when he has never been on wing before in his life, and maybe never up in the air, he has still more of the old moxie.

"And when he *does* a 'chute jump—actually does it—when he doesn't know a parachute from Eddie Stinson—then that guy has so much of the stuff it takes that it's going to waste. Sure, I'm going to teach him to fly! Maybe it'll have an angle later—maybe not. But if he works as well as he talks, and if his nerve holds out, he'll have his chance."

And Rolfe did have his chance. Three months later Ken Morey began giving him flying lessons while the Circus was in winter quarters at New Orleans. Rolfe learned quickly, until it came to the business of making landings. Then he was a washout. In the air he was a swell pilot. But he never made a solo landing. He was "ground shy."

The ground shyness became a personal insult to Ken Morey. He gritted his teeth and spent whole hours with Rolfe in a plane, determined that Rolfe would make good landings. In the end he had to give it up.

"It's no use, Jeff," he told him. "You can't make the grade. You have a screw loose somewhere. If you keep on monkeying around with airplanes, on your own, you'll kill yourself. I honestly believe I've given you more than I ever gave a student in my life. But somehow it didn't take. I'm sorry. I mean it. I'm sorry."

Rolfe swallowed hard and looked away. Then he turned to face Morey. He offered his hand, almost timidly.

"Thank you, Mr. Morey," he said. "I'll remember you—as long as I live. If I can't fly, it's my fault, not yours. You've been the best friend I ever had."

When Morey came back from town that night Jefferson Rolfe was gone. No one knew exactly where. He was just gone.

CHAPTER IV.

EVER DAUNTLESS.

THREE years later Ken Morey saw Jeff Rolfe a second time. He was sitting in the lobby of the Statler in Cleveland. He was looking idly through the *Plain Dealer*. He turned a page, and a four-column picture leaped out of the page at him. A picture and a caption.

His jaw dropped open. The picture was of Jefferson Rolfe. The caption said:

NEGRO ACE POISED FOR FLIGHT TO LIBERIA.

There was a running story under the caption. Morey read every word of it:

Jefferson Rolfe, "World's Greatest Negro Ace," comes out of Harlem tomorrow to attempt an achievement unique to his race. Weather permitting, Rolfe will

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lift his seaplane off the waters of the Hudson River and turn its nose toward Liberia, on the west coast of Africa, in an attempt to make the longest over-water flight. Rolfe, a romantic and flaming figure, has completely captured the imagination of Harlemites. The tremendons Negro population of New York subscribed to the cost of building the transatlantic ship. It is expected that the entire population of Harlem will migrate to the banks of the Hudson River tomorrow to watch the take-off and to cheer on the Negro flier.

"Well—I'll be damned!" said Morey. He wanted to laugh. He wanted to call the boys of the Circus, to exhibit the picture, to give them all a laugh. But he didn't. The memory of Rolfe's face and eyes and voice arose before him.

"Why, the crazy mug! Liberia! He couldn't navigate his way to the Statue of Liberty."

He chewed on his cigar. After a moment he got out of his chair and paced the lobby. Then he turned suddenly to the transportation desk in the hotel and bought transportation to New York. He told no one connected with the Circus where he was going.

In New York a taxi took him to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and the Hudson River. It was seven in the morning. From One Hundred and Tenth Street the taxi had to crawl through streets crowded with Harlemites. They were laughing, shouting. They carried banners and pennants and placards.

ON TO LIBERIA! ROOT FOR ROLFE!
GOODWILL FLIGHT ACROSS THE SEA.

The taxi driver grinned as he cursed and sweated. "This guy Rolfe sure has those boys and girls stirred up. Think he'll make it?"

"He'll probably kill himself," growled Morey. "Can't you get somewhere with this crate?"

The driver shrugged his shoulders. He honked his horn. Finally Morey had to get out and walk the last four or five hundred yards. He was the only white man in the crowd.

A cordon of policemen kept the crowd back. It seemed that certain of the Harlemites were so excited they insisted upon wading right into the river to cheer on the Great Ace. Then, after a half hour's wait, they had reason to cheer. A limousine came down to the water's edge, and from it stepped Jefferson Rolfe.

Morey stared. Rolfe was dressed in jet black from head to foot. It began with a jet black helmet on his head. Went down to a jet black Russian blouse buttoned tight around his neck and belted at the belly. Jet black riding breeches and black boots.

He said nothing, but the roar of the crowd lifted to greater and greater frenzies of delight. He stood for a moment, before entering the launch which was to carry him out on the river. There was a sudden silence. Then he stepped into the boat, and it chugged out into midstream.

Morey looked at the seaplane bobbing up and down on the swift current of the river. He wanted to laugh, to yell. For the flying boat out there was a tiny F-boat, vintage of 1916, crazy of construction, and designed for the training of Navy pilots. It had a gasoline capacity of forty gallons.

It had a crazy four-cylinder motor in it—the same motor that had burned a dozen planes like this one because of the design of its exhaust stacks. In the

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hands of an *expert* pilot that F-boat was nothing more than a death trap. Even if it got into the air it could fly no more than three hours, at a sustained speed of forty-five or fifty miles an hour.

And this was the "transatlantic" seaplane Jeff Rolfe was going to use to fly to Liberia!

BUT the suffocating black mass of humanity at the water's edge knew nothing of F-boats. They only knew that Jefferson Rolfe, the Black Ace, was going to fly to Liberia for the glory and honor of the Black Race. The plane was out there. Rolfe was climbing into the cockpit. The day of glory was at hand.

It became like a camp meeting. The black mass was jittering on its feet. Voices were singing. Hands were clapping, eyes were rolling. The singing became a chant.

Morey stood there, a crushed feeling within him, his eyes looking out over the muddy run of water.

The prop on the F-boat turned as a colored mechanic, also dressed in black, pulled it through. The sound of the motor came ashore. There was a ripple of stirred water behind the F-boat. The singing became wilder, deeper, louder. It was hypnotic.

Then Rolfe opened the throttle on the F-boat. The chant became a sustained scream. The F-boat moved over the water and a white foam formed in front of its hull. It moved slowly, gathered speed. The motor raced and racked. The nose went up and down, up and down, as Rolfe horsed on the "Dep-controls." After a struggle the boat got up on the step. Then it moved swiftly. It became lighter. It was skipping the surface of the water.

Morey discovered that there was a terrific tension in his chest. His mouth was dry. The F-boat wrenched itself from the Hudson. It lifted—a dozen feet or more. It leveled its wings. It was flying.

And the voice of the black thousands became ecstatic with excitement.

And then—the F-boat settled. Flattened toward the water. The nose jerked up. It stalled. It fell off on one wing. It dived toward the surface. It disappeared, except for its tail.

There was a great puff of black smoke. A muffled explosion. The tail of the boat churned and threshed above the surface. A patrol boat darted for the spot. A man went overboard, dived under the surface, trying to get at Rolfe. Another dived—and another.

After a terrible pause, they came back to the surface, supporting a limp figure. They put it in the patrol boat. They dashed for the shore, working over it as they dashed.

The silence which hung over the river seemed to batter at the consciousness. Then a single voice began a low-pitched croon—a wailing, plaintive, sobbing chant.

Morey turned away. He fought his way through the black mass. He went downtown, to the station—and back to Cleveland.

Next day the *Plain Dealer* said:

Jefferson Rolfe, Negro Ace, failed in his attempted goodwill flight to Liberia, when his plane refused to lift its heavy gas load from the surface of the Hudson River at New York.

One hundred thousand Harlem negroes lined the shores to bid him God-speed, and witnessed the almost fatal end of the attempt. The plane dived under the waters of the river, carrying Rolfe, strapped

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in the pilot's seat, with it. Expert and immediate rescue by the New York Harbor Police saved Rolfe from death. The ship was destroyed.

Plans are already under way in the black metropolis to provide Rolfe with a bigger and better plane.

Morey tossed the paper away from him. "The crazy fool!" he growled. "The parading, four-flushing idiot! He knew damned well he never had a chance to get that thing off the water—"

And Jefferson Rolfe disappeared a second time from the notice of Ken Morey.

CHAPTER V.

FALLING STAR.

FROM the Holy Bible:

The Song of Songs which is *Solomon's.*

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard I have not kept.

Thus sang the Queen of Queens whose name was Sheba. And the words she sang to Solomon come down to us to this day, written in gold upon the pages of the Holy Book, establishing the genealogy of the Royal House of Abyssinia. Thus does the Imperial Blood of Judea, of Israel, flow in the veins of the House of Abyssinia—Ethiopia—even unto this day.

Thus does it flow in the veins of Ras Tafari who, with his own hands crowned himself, Haile Selassie, King of Kings, Lion of Judah, Emperor of Abyssinia, in the year of Our Lord, 1928, after vanquishing the chaos and bloodshed which beset the country. Thus did a son of the blood of the great Sahale Selassie succeed to the throne of his fathers. Thus did he preserve the eighteen centuries of written Christian history which is Ethiopia.

True son of the blood royal was Ras Tafari. He was straight and strong, and his eye was the eye of the Eagle. The love of country boiled within him, and he labored to restore the ancient glories of his people.

Even as he mounted the Throne of his Fathers, and took up the lion skin mantle, he knew that eyes in Europe were turned avariciously toward Ethiopia, and that certain European powers itched with the desire to dominate and to exploit Abyssinia.

Out of Eritrea and the Somalilands danger threatened. Eritrea—for centuries a part of Ethiopia and wrested from the hands of a weaker Ethiopian ruler to become a vassal province of a European power. Ras Tafari looked at his maps—the ancient maps, and the maps of his day.

Little by little the land of Ethiopia had been wrested away. Until at last the nation was a shadowy outline, held within the line of the Blue Nile, Eritrea, British Somaliland, French Somaliland and Italian Somaliland.

And Ras Tafari lifted his head, and to his people he said: "Thus far and no farther shall the borders of Abyssinia recede. No more territory shall be lost to us. If we are invaded, the

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invader will march through the land only over the heaps of Ethiopian dead. When the last Abyssinian is dead, then only will he conquer."

And, being a wise ruler, he knew that the ancient weapons of his people could not prevail against the ponderous tanks and airplanes and field guns of a modern enemy. So he took counsel, and he gathered in Addis Ababa, his capital, men from many nations to advise him on the defense of his country.

One man came to the Court of the Lion of Judah from far off America. He was an expert on flying and airplanes. The Emperor gave him warm welcome and listened carefully to his counsel. The American's name was Ken Morey.

LIFE had slowed in its tempo for Ken Morey. The Powers-That-Be in American aviation had suddenly decided that there was no place in the scheme of things for an outfit like the Ace Flying Circus. They admitted with grave nods, in response to Morey's pleas, that the Circus had done more to bring flying to the American people, and to excite the popular interest in flying than any other single medium—but, after all, aviation was no longer hazardous, aviation was no longer a thing of thrills. Aviation was to be a thing of fixed routes, of fixed schedules, of cut and dried procedure.

The ruling went out. No thrills, no stunts, no exhibitions which might give people to think that flying was any more exciting than a Sunday afternoon drive or a trip from New York to Philadelphia by train. Big Business took over flying. Took it over for the production of dividends and the selling of stock.

So, after seventeen years, the Ace Flying Circus came to an end. Its death sentence was a mimeographed form from the newly-organized Department of Commerce Aviation Section. No flying below two thousand feet over built-up sections. No stunts. No plane changes. Aircraft were licensed like automobiles. Pilots were graded according to experience and strange ideas on the part of non-fliers as to what should constitute an "examination" into the "fitness" of a pilot to be entrusted with passengers.

It seemed to make little difference to the department that the Ace Flying Circus had carried three million passengers a distance of millions of miles without scratching a single passenger—a record of safety and performance never approached. It made little difference that men like Eddie Grimes and Barrel-Roll Early had flown eight and ten thousand hours from all sorts of fields in all sorts of weather *without instruments and without a crack-up.*

So Ken Morey confronted life at a dead halt, and wandered over the face of the earth, a trifle dazed, a trifle shaken, and with nothing to do. For the Circus had been his life. The pilots of the Circus went somewhere—to South America, to China. They lost themselves.

But Ken Morey was too great a promoter, too great a salesman, to have flying forget him. Big Business approached Ken Morey in the guise of a giant Aircraft Corporation. And Morey became "Sales Engineer" for a concern which built nothing but military type aircraft.

As a super-salesman of flying death, Morey went around the world, leading his little caravan of experts—riggers, mechanics and engineers. The huge packing cases which contained his "samples" were swung into the holds of a dozen liners. China, the Balkans,

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Russia, the Argentine, Chile, Columbia, Mexico—he spread his wings over them all.

He was in competition with the greatest manufacturers of aircraft in the world. Once his product was "set up" ready for demonstration he could prove his point only by making his Wasps perform feats impossible to the competing planes.

With Ken Morey at the controls the Wasp was the greatest fighting plane in the world. Without Morey, it was just another military aircraft. Where trouble brewed, where the storm clouds of war threatened, where the thunder rumbled, there went Ken Morey and his Wasps. Until he came to Ethiopia—to the empire of the Lion of Judah. To the land of the lion skin mantle.

IN Ethiopia he had the feeling of having been snatched back along the roadway of time. For in Ethiopia the mark of the ancient lay upon the land, and things were done as they had been done eighteen hundred years ago. The walled villages were entirely Judean in appearance.

The proud, fierce blood was unsullied by foreign admixture. Her princes and her rulers were still of the pure blood of Solomon and Sheba. Her language was the *Amharic* of the days of Egypt and Tyre, Jerusalem and Arabia.

And the Ethiopians! They walked like kings. Tall, beautifully built, lean with the power to endure. Faces reflecting a calm dignity. Eyes like the eyes of eagles, keen, all-seeing, calculating, fearless. They were dressed in the woolen or cotton robes of their fathers and forefathers. Over the robes the chiefs wore the lion skin mantle. A lion's mane formed the head-dress of a chief. The citizen went with his head uncovered. The prince sat under an umbrella.

Except for the army of Ras Tafari there was no change. But Ras Tafari was the most learned and most intelligent and the best leader among his people. He knew "politics" and he knew that "imperialism" was fed upon conquest and fresh-shed blood. He knew the meaning of "economic necessity" as practised against small nations by a great nation.

So be bought modern rifles and machine guns—and he wanted to buy airplanes.

For a long time Morey was to remember that first flight he made over Ethiopian territory. Five hundred chiefs and their warriors had gathered in Addis Ababa to witness the great demonstration. The emperor himself had taken seat beside the flying field.

The Wasps had been uncrated and were gleaming under the hot sun. Fifty thousand white-clad Ethiopians surrounded the field, which was nothing more than a marked-off expanse of open country. A score of Europeans watched in suspicious hostility.

The sudden roar and beat of the Wasp's motor seemed to rend and tear aside the veil of centuries. And then, the fast-moving, powerful plane had hurled itself in the air. The whining drone of the motor seeped into the nerve fibers of the spectators.

For thirty minutes Ken Morey flew the Wasp as recklessly, as expertly as he had ever flown in his life.

Finally, at the end of the exhibition, when Ras Tafari's eyes were glowing with satisfaction and triumph, Morey took the Wasp straight up, ten thousand feet, until it was lost in the glare of the sunlight filling the heights over Addis Ababa. And then, with a sweep of his hand on the controls, he nosed

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it over into a vertical, plunging dive under full throttle.

The sobbing, ripping scream of the motor in the Wasp filled the universe. It rose thinner, more terrible as the ship rocketed downward. The fifty thousand black warriors and civilians caught the sheen of its diving wings. They watched in breathless fascination. Watched, until the ship was diving straight for them, until it was like a guided thunderbolt over their heads, until its screaming, terrible sound tore at them and set nerves to quivering. And then, with a hoarse shout, they broke and ran or threw themselves flat on the ground to escape the plunging death.

BUT Ras Tafari did not move on his throne. He kept his eyes fixed on the plane. Neither did the tribal chiefs move. If this was death they were unafraid—even of this unknown death.

Five hundred feet above their heads Morey pulled the Wasp out of the dive. It went raving over them, so swiftly that eyes could not follow it. And then the motor beat deafened them as Morey pulled it up, vertically, until it again disappeared.

He landed, casually, walked away from the ship. He was wondering if he had "sold" the King of Kings on the Wasp.

An officer-courier of the king spoke to him. "His Majesty desires to speak with you."

Morey followed the courier. He came face to face with Ras Tafari. The emperor sat and looked at him for a long moment with his deep-set, burning eyes. Then he spoke, in a rich, deep baritone:

"When men are greater than other men—when one man conquers even the elements, as you have conquered them—when a man can toy with death and laugh, when he can lift his body of earth up to the very sun—that man is fitted for honors."

He took from his own neck a diamond-studded decoration. He touched Ken Morey on the shoulders with his hands, and hung the crimson ribbon with the diamond decoration suspended from it about Morey's neck. The warriors about the emperor raised a great shout. Swords flashed from scabbards. Lances went up. Ensigns were dipped. The officers about the throne saluted gravely.

It was not until later that Morey understood that he had been given the Star of Ethiopia.

He flew many times after that. He flew over the Somaliland and Danakil lowlands, hot and dry. He saw the basin of the Sobat from the air, with its steaming death lifting from the swamps. He looked down upon the Galla highlands, where all is beauty and health. He saw the deep valleys of Takazze and Abbai where the fevers lurk, and where the climate is so torrid none but the century-hardened and immunized Ethiopians can live.

The forests and rivers and deserts and villages of Ethiopia, he saw them all. He flew along the borders of Eritrea, and rifles shot at him. He saw the herds of sheep and the goats and the fine long-horned oxen. But he saw no roads, no wheeled traffic—and but one railroad line. The French road to Djibouti.

The mud and wattle villages were like clusters of toadstools. He wondered why a great power should desire to possess such a land. It would require a century to colonize Ethiopia, even if the country could be conquered. It would require a century and the labors

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of a Hercules to penetrate the mountains, to build roads, to build railroads.

Such a task would bankrupt any power. And it would bankrupt any power to keep the Ethiopians in subjugation even if conquered. For when he looked at them he well understood that death was the only defeat possible to these black warriors.

At the end of his flying he sold to the emperor the two Wasps he had brought with him from the United States.

Every day the emperor came out to look at his new "air force." The lithe, dangerous-looking ships seemed to please him, to ease his mind when he glanced at that Eritrean border from which danger would come. But with the exception of Ken Morey, there was no living person in Ethiopia who could fly the Wasps.

MOREY walked on the main street of Addis Ababa. He was suddenly homesick. He sensed his isolation in this country. He was suddenly sick for the sound of an American voice, an American face. It began when the cable came from the Wasp people: "Remain Addis Ababa awaiting developments Stop Shipping six Wasps your order Stop Sure you will be able to dispose of these."

War was in the air. Danger was in the air. In spite of the fact that he had been honored by the emperor, the black faces he passed on the street were stony-eyed and unfriendly. Foreign governments were gathering nationals, urging them out of the country.

In Eritrea divisions of the foreign army were gathering for the conquest of the country. Everywhere, the cavalry of Ethiopia was on the march. Everywhere, troops were being trained, rifles were cracking, machine guns stuttering. Everywhere Ethiopians were gathering to the defense of the ancient freedom. Not more than a dozen white men remained in Addis Ababa.

Then, in the midst of a step, Ken Morey suddenly stood still and stared. Something was coming along the street. Something in rags; without shoes, with glaring eyes. Something half-starved, desperate, even more isolated from the black population than white Ken Morey.

And there was something familiar about that gaunt face—about those eyes!

Ken Morey uttered a yelp and rushed forward. "Rolfe!" he shouted. "Jeff Rolfe! Of all people!"

It was Rolfe, without the gilt helmet, without the black Russian blouse. His saddle-colored flesh showed through the rents in his shirt. His mouth was dry and his tongue swollen. His face had the look of suffering and starvation.

He stood still and stared with his red-rimmed eyes.

"Mr. Morey!" he said thickly. "Mr. Morey—"

He seemed to expend half of his strength in uttering the words. He swayed on his feet, fought to keep erect.

Morey grabbed him by the arm. It was a dozen steps to the hotel. He half-supported him up the steps. He eased him down on a chair before a table. He gave him water first, then food. And Rolfe ate like a wolf, tore at the food with his white teeth.

They spoke no word for half an hour. Then Rolfe said, "Thank you." Very simply.

They went upstairs. Morey rummaged through his trunk. He was trying to forget the sight of Rolfe's feet,

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cut and bruised. He found clothing that Rolfe could wear.

While he searched for the clothing he grunted words at Rolfe. Just words, to keep his voice gruff, and to keep his gladness at the sound of an American voice under control.

"I saw that exhibition you made of yourself on the Hudson—that America-to-Liberia Flight," he threw over his shoulder. "So you didn't take my advice and bury all that Black Ace stuff."

THERE was a long silence from Rolfe.

Then, "You saw that?" he answered dully. "I'm sorry. Even when I was going out in the boat, to that silly F-boat, I wondered—if you were present."

"You knew damned well you couldn't fly an F-boat to Africa!" charged Morey hotly. "You knew you never took a boat of any kind off the water in your whole life. What was the idea of making a show of yourself? More glory, eh? More 'natural flying,' I suppose?"

"No, I knew I couldn't fly an F-boat to Africa." Rolfe's voice was still dull and tinged with pain. "It wasn't natural flying. But—I had to make the try. It was for the honor—of my own kind."

"Honor!" grunted Morey. "Honor, to take in a couple of thousand gullible Harlem Negroes? Mulct them of the money they put up to buy the ship. Honor, to parade down Lenox Avenue in that outfit I saw you wearing?"

"You don't understand, Mr. Morey," said Rolfe. "I went to New York to get a job—any kind of a job. I got to be a superintendent of a colored apartment house—janitor would be a better name. Then, one day, somebody saw those press books I had—from the old flying circus days. That somebody, I don't know who, told a newspaper man.

"The newspaper printed a story about how Jefferson Rolfe—the Black Ace—was working in Harlem as a janitor. They came around and took pictures. And then, suddenly, all Harlem was on my front doorstep. Before I knew it, before I could stop it, there was a collection being taken up for a New York-to-Liberia flight. I was to do the flying. Some dishonest persons formed the organization, took advantage of the story in the papers. They used my name—as if I *was* at the back of it all."

He stopped to take a deep breath, and went on: "Those promoters handled all the money—bought that crazy F-boat—announced that I was to make the flight on a certain day. I saw none of the money. I had nothing to do with it. But I could not back out. They would have called me a coward. They would have sneered at the colored race if I had backed out after the stories. So—I went down to the river. And you saw what happened."

"Suppose you had gotten that crate into the air, suppose you had started to fly? Then what—with forty gallons of gas?"

Rolfe's eyes looked out through the open window. "It would have made little difference to me," he said, without dramatics. "I would have flown straight to sea—kept flying, until the gas was gone. It seemed that life was done for me. Everything I wanted seemed impossible because I was black, or because of myself. There was no place for me. It would have been much simpler. But that kindness, that disappearance—even that was taken away from me. The ship would not fly. I had to go back to face it. The sneers."

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There was another long silence.

"I decided to come here, Mr. Morey. I thought that in this land of blacks—in this country of my own people, where the Negro is proud of his history and his lineage I might find my place. I worked a way to Europe, to France. I stowed away at Marseilles on an African boat. They found me—I escaped. I got another boat—and another.

"And then it was Somaliland. I rode the bumpers of the railroad cars across the desert from Djibouti until they threw me off in the middle of the desert. But—somehow I got here."

He shook his head with sudden bitterness. "But people. I can't understand them or even tell them why I am here. Out there on the street, I think, I was dying when you saw me."

HIS voice trailed away, to flare again with a sudden spark. "But the war is coming. They talk about nothing else. There are planes and troops and artillery thronging into Eritrea."

"For a guy who had a star," grinned Morey, "you certainly are getting hell knocked out of you."

"I have a star," said Rolfe, almost in a whisper. "It brought me here—it drove me through heat, when I could not feel my own feet. It held cold water to my mouth when I was dying of thirst. I have lost everything I once thought I possessed—excepting my star."

He gazed with blank eyes across the expanse of country beyond the city.

"Somehow," he said, almost to himself in a queer, crooning voice, "I know it will rise here—against the heavens—under this sky."

"Aw, you're crazy as hell!" growled Morey. "You better forget all that stuff. I'll take you back with me when I go. I'll see that you get some kind of a job."

"I'm not going back." Rolfe's hand struck against his chest like a drum beat. "I feel it here."

CHAPTER VI.

WINGED DEATH.

THE war came to Ethiopia with the suddenness of a sharply-drawn breath. In one hour there had been peace. And in the next hour a courier came riding into the city, his horse white with lather and buckling at the knees. A courier, a warrior—armed with the ancient weapons of his people, bleeding from a score of wounds, falling on his face before the palace of Ras Tafari, shouting in a husky voice:

"The war-birds of the enemy have struck, O King of Kings! There is death in the villages—the death that kills without being seen—that falls from the bellies of the man-birds! Women and children are among the dead, O King of Kings, for the death of the enemy spares none, the noise of the enemy man-birds is terrible in the land!"

And Ras Tafari by this knew that the enemy, treating him with a contempt supreme, had made war upon him, without even the formal declaration of hostilities usual between civilized people, and had struck at a point where the telegraph could not flash news of the attack.

Then Ras Tafari stood erect. His hands were clenched at his sides and fire blazed in his eyes.

"So be it!" he boomed in his deep voice. "God is our witness. We have done no thing to provoke this war.

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We have been long-suffering and patient. We have asked nothing but to be left in peace within our own borders. Now our people have been killed, and foully. Now we are attacked. Now we are treated like slaves.

"Better to die free than to live enslaved. Let the trumpets sound and let the war begin. Let the lightnings blind and the thunder crash. Let there be killings and the taking of prisoners—for this does our enemy demand of us. And if God wills that our enemy should march across our country, let it be only when there is none living to witness our shame. I have spoken."

A great shout went up within the city. And the armories were opened and the troops were armed with the new weapons which Ras Tafari, in his wisdom, had provided against this day. Machine guns were snatched by eager hands, and avid hands reached for and received new rifles. And ancient warriors fondled the new weapons. The Ethiopian cavalry, which had never known defeat in fifty centuries, trotted across the plain, thousands and thousands, white burnouses fluttering in the still air, the acrid dust stirred up by the feet of the horses rising above the columns. Curved swords swinging from saddles and high-powered rifles thrust into rifle boots slung from the same saddles.

They rode at a gallop past the emperor. The swords were snatched out of the scabbards, leaped upward like lances of living flame in the imperial salute. The voices of the horsemen came out of their chests as they shouted his name. They rode away, toward the borders of Eritrea. Guns rumbled after them, and the infantry followed the moving dust columns.

And Ken Morey, with Jefferson Rolfe, watched it all from the balcony of the hotel. There was a stirring within Morey and his hands itched for the feel of controls, and for the feel of hot machine gun mechanism, and the stabbing clatter of the guns blasting at an enemy. But he gave no sign.

Rolfe, his somber eyes filled with lights and shadows, watched, and there was a hunger within him, and a loneliness. For there was no place for him among those thousands below.

The two Wasps stood on the field, alone, like thoroughbred horses awaiting the hand of a master.

The telegraph clicked incessantly. The enemy was striking from a dozen sources. The ground troops of the enemy attacked and recoiled before the fierce resistance of the Ethiopian tribesmen. The Ethiopian cavalry swept through barrages of machine gun fire. They were completely indifferent to death. They sabred the enemy machine gunners at their guns. The battle cry was the defy of Ras Tafari. "Better to die than to live as slaves."

The enemy troops were suffering torture in the heat. They were burned by fevers and wasted with dysentery. More and more thousands of them poured across the Eritrean border. But everywhere the Ethiopian troops held the vantage points and would not be dislodged. Vantage points they knew by heart after the lessons of warfare throughout those fifty centuries.

THEY held the vantage points, and could not be dislodged—until the scream and drone of whining motors came from overhead and concussion and shock and impact rained down on them. Until the earth about them staggered and flamed and was blasted by bombs dropped from the bellies of the enemy planes. Until whole villages were wiped out in the

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space of one minute. Villages, miles from the fighting line. Villages, with everything which had lived dead, and the black smoke of destruction rising.

The man-birds — they were like agents of God. They were like swift-flying Angels of Death, passing with the screaming of angry wings, and dealing death to the defenseless. They killed, and the Ethiopian troops were beginning to believe that something supernatural shrieked through the air in those planes. Supernatural—immortal—because the Ethiopian troops fired with machine guns and rifles at those planes—but no plane fell.

Ras Tafari paced the halls of his palace, his face troubled and his brain weary. Ras Tafari knew the meaning of morale. He knew that enemy airplanes alone could not conquer Ethiopia. But they could break the morale of Ethiopian troops. They could break the morale of a civilian population. The troops and the civilians could understand fighting man to man to the death. But to be killed—out of the heavens—by an unknown death. Well—those simple primitives knew that only God could deal death from the heavens.

Ras Tafari knew that it must be shown to them that these enemy airmen were not *gods*. The troops must know the airmen were not immune against death. They must understand that they were mortal as any Ethiopian soldier.

Ras Tafari prayed that a miracle would occur. That in some way these enemy planes would encounter disaster. That at least one of them would be shot down, so that its pilot could be exhibited to the people as a mere man.

But no miracle took place. The enemy planes ranged far and wide. They continued to shower death.

Sometimes the enemy planes caught Ethiopian cavalry in the midst of great open spaces. And the earth became a shambles littered with dying and gutted men and horses. Then the enemy attacked Ankober from the air.

The people of Addis Ababa saw the survivors of Ankober. Saw gashed bodies, faces stiff with terror. They heard tales of black night with the sudden sound of droning from afar, and then the scream of diving planes and the crashing of explosions. Of whole streets wiped out in one instant. Of bodies flying upward into space, and falling, dismembered, ghastly. Of parents splattered with the blood of their children.

The survivors made way into the capital city. Terror was written upon their faces and their bodies.

The people of Addis Ababa waited in silence. Waited for the enemy to strike at the capital. The first enemy to approach near enough to strike such a blow in all the centuries of the Ethiopian nation. They waited for the curtain of death to fall upon them.

KEN MOREY awoke with a start. He was at first conscious of the terrible, heavy, oppressive heat. He lifted his body from the hot, sodden surface of his bed and listened. There was a nervous pulse beating in his chest.

Then he heard the sound which had seeped into his subconscious and had awakened him.

It was like a far-off, low moaning. He straightened suddenly and his feet struck the floor. He crossed the room to the windows with one leap. He thrust his head out into the Abyssinian night. He looked up at the star-strewn sky. The sound became louder, angrier. It was like the approach of a typhoon.

He whirled, snatched at clothes and

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his money belt, grabbed for his pistol. He thrust his feet into his trousers. He kicked open the door of his room and raced down the steps.

That far-off moaning! He knew that sound. Enemy bombers. Multi-engined, long-range aircraft. Coming out of Eritrea against Addis Ababa, laden with tons of violent death.

He crashed open the door of Jeff Rolfe's room. He shouted into the darkness within the room:

"They're coming! They're coming! Get up out of there before you get murdered! Get the hell out into the open!"

The sound out of the black heavens was like a dull knife cutting through flesh.

There was no answer from Rolfe. Morey pawed for the light switch. For one instant a glare illumined the room. Long enough to reveal an empty bed. Rolfe was gone.

Morey raced to the ground floor and out into the street. He found himself amid a flood of women in white burnouses. The women were leading whimpering children. Donkeys were moving through the streets, the clicking sound of little hoofs strange against the background of that moaning sky.

Troops trotted about. At street corners machine gun crews were mounting guns on tripods.

But Morey knew they might have saved themselves the effort. One does not kill hawks with popguns, when the hawks are flying at altitudes of more than a mile.

Subconscious instinct directed Morey for the open space which had been given over to a flying field for the Wasps. He elbowed and fought his way through the teeming streets while the ominous, rising whine from the heights grew nearer and nearer.

Somehow he got to the field. He saw his two Wasps standing on the line. The men he had brought with him from the States were running about the field, clutching useless weapons, stopping now and then to peer up into the black heavens. He shouted to them:

"Get those ships under cover!" And even as he shouted he knew himself for a fool. Under what cover? There was no cover—only the great open expanse of the field.

He was still two hundred yards from the nearest ship when he heard the barking of a motor in the nose of one of the Wasps. He stopped dead in his tracks. He stared. He caught the jerky movement of a propeller turning through its first revolutions. He heard the whining of the inertia starter.

He knew, even as he stared, that it was impossible for that propeller to be moving. That, too, was a part of the nightmare. But the propeller *was* moving! And a shadowy shape was climbing into the cockpit of the Wasp.

He shouted again. He ran madly toward the ship.

BUT the roar of the motor blanketed his shouts. Flame spat from the exhaust stacks. The Wasp turned into the wind, ran free on its wheels, picked up speed—faster and faster—launched itself into space. It went boring upward.

Morey came to a panting halt. "What a fool!" he said in a strangled voice. "What a fool!" His eyes, straining, followed the shadowy course of the spiraling Wasp.

With the exception of Ken Morey there was only one man in Ethiopia who could fly. And there was only one man in the world crazy enough to attempt suicide in a pursuit ship he had

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never flown, and which he could never land. That man was Jefferson Rolfe. And Morey knew that Rolfe was in the cockpit of that Wasp—climbing up and up, to meet the threat of the enemy bombers.

High above, still concealed by the darkness, the enemy bombing formation dived earthward. They came with the complete contempt of men who knew well that nothing can oppose them or do them harm. They dived in formation. The thin note of the multi-motors became a shrill screaming. They were over the city—down under five thousand feet. They were suddenly visible. They grew wings out of the blackness. They assumed shape.

Then there was a blinding, searing flash of flame from amid the houses of the city. The earth rocked with the explosion. A geyser of flame, white-cored, burst upward. A dozen houses erupted violently, lifted into the air, became falling rubble, showering down on the heads of the hundreds in the streets. There was the suggestion of white burnouses caught up and whirled around in that maelestrom of destruction, before the burnouses were dissolved in the flame.

A hoarse, animal-like scream broke from the throats of the milling people.

Then a score of bombs fell upon them at one time. Flame, like a running liquid, broke out of the wreckage, ran along the streets, licked at the white burnouses, added to the horror.

A sound from the heights seemed to interrupt the falling death. A new sound—jagged, staccato. The tidal wave of death seemed to abate before the sound. It seeped down out of the heights in which the bombers flew. One thing in the world made such a sound—machine guns! Machine guns chattered up there in the blackness.

The formation of bombers was tossed into confusion by the sound. The big ships seemed to recoil. Through the droning of the enemy motors came the single furious note of an American motor under full throttle. It was a scream, a challenge. In the midst of the scream the machine guns jabbered and hammered in short, sharp, deadly bursts.

A strange quiet grew up within the stricken city. Even the wounded forgot to moan. The still living stood, faces upturned to the star-filled sky, watching the slashing play of the shadows, and listening to the machine guns.

THE Wasp was white. It ripped through space like a white comet. It came tearing in at a bomber on the extreme left of the formation. The guns in the Wasp chattered again. The bomber staggered, lurched drunkenly.

A sudden, great cry arose from the streets of Addis Ababa. There was flame in the skies—like the flame on the earth. Flame, licking eagerly at the nose and belly of one of those great night flying destroyers. Flame which lit the marking on the wings of the big ship.

The white comet slashed over the wings of the stricken bomber, pounced upon a second of the big ships. In its wake came a terrific explosion. A smear of orange green flame lit the heavens like a monstrous flashlight. Out of the explosion flew broken wings and a broken tail section. A man tumbled head over heels through space trying to save himself with a parachute.

The enemy formation churned about in confusion. Pilots were fighting to save themselves from collision. Wings threshed about. The big ships banked slowly, attempted to escape the white comet which struck at them.

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A machine gunner in the fuselage of one of the bombers lined the white Wasp in his sights, squeezed the trigger, carefully, slowly. The gun muzzle squirted flame full into the face of the Wasp. The little ship veered sharply. Then it dived headlong at the machine gunner, and its own guns answered viciously. Little ghostly fingers flitted across space between the ships, seemed to caress the fuselage of the bomber—seemed to burst into red rockets.

On the ground, Morey stood, his face white, his hands clenched, watching Jefferson Rolfe in the white Wasp. He knew one belt going through those twin guns was loaded with incendiary shells, the other with explosive cartridges. He had demonstrated those agents of death to the emperor. But Ras Tafari was getting a better demonstration of the terrible little death capsules than ever Ken Morey had been able to arrange.

The high explosive bullets broke against the fuselage of the second enemy ship. There was a series of broken explosions, and then tendrils of fire along the tracery cut into the bomber by the incendiaries.

Two more men went overboard from the bombers, fell and fell, lit by the red glare of the burning city and by the glare of the burning fragments of the bomber falling slowly downward through space.

There was the grinding, crumpling sound of the two ships smashing together—of metal-sheathed wings reduced to junk, and then the wailing of falling ships.

And through it all, the constant stabbing of machine guns. Enemy guns and the guns in front of Jeff Rolfe's cockpit.

The bombers' formation was destroyed. They were fighting to save themselves, now the fight drifted farther and farther to the northeast. One after the other the bombers, as if by signal, withdrew from the action, went winging into the darkness—were swallowed up.

THE white Wasp pounced upon the last of them, dived madly into the face of point-blank machine gun fire. It ripped at the great black shape, flame stabbing from twin gun muzzles—and then, was suddenly silent. Only the droning whine of its motor came down to earth as the last of the bombers lurched drunkenly and staggered after its fellows into the northeast.

A heavy silence settled over the earth, broken only by the crackling of the flames on the earth, and the sound of the throttled motor in the Wasp. The people stood staring at the darkness overhead, splashed with the blood of their own kin, burned by the fire which gutted their own homes. They stood huddled, as the children of Israel must have stood when the hand of Jehovah delivered them out of peril.

The descending sound of the white Wasp crept nearer and nearer to the earth, until there was no motor sound. Merely the whispering of the wings.

It came over the field, at last, a white wraith, slipping sharply to lose forward speed. It settled, a little at a time. It seemed to hover over the ground as if reluctant to return to earth. Then there was a little bumping of its wheels as it struck perfectly and rolled to a stop.

Ken Morey found himself racing over the field—racing ahead of a black wave which raced after him. He reached the side of the Wasp's cockpit, clutched at it with his hands.

"You fool," he choked. "You fool!"

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Rolfe was sitting very straight in the cockpit. His face was drawn, but there was a grim smile about his mouth. He sat there, his head turned a little, looking down at Morey, that smile moving the corners of his mouth.

His voice seemed to ebb and flow with his breathing. "Did you see it? Did you see it?"

"How could I miss it?" demanded Morey. "You flew rings around those babies! A couple of them are down! That last one will be down before it goes ten miles!"

"I—I don't mean the bombers," said Rolfe. There was a little flutter in his deep voice. "I mean—the landing! The landing! I could feel it. Down on all three points. The first perfect landing I've ever made. And in a Wasp!"

Morey grinned whitely. "Sure—you're a pilot now, Kid! I saw it. Just like an old-timer!" He jerked his hand away suddenly. It felt wet and sticky. He wiped it on the fuselage. It left a red smear for the palm and little red tracks for each finger.

"I didn't tell you," went on Rolfe's voice. "One of the reasons I came here was you. I read you were here. Somehow I knew you would be here—when my star rose. I felt it. I wanted you to see it more, I think, than anyone in the world—my star—in the sky."

MOREY was working silently and desperately at the strap holding Rolfe in the seat. He knew Rolfe was hurt, badly. He could hear the rasping of breath, he could see the jerky rise and fall of Jeff Rolfe's chest.

"Listen to that!" he told him, almost like a croon, as he worked to free Rolfe from the cockpit. "Listen to them scream—yell! Listen to those guns being fired! You're a hero, Jeff. Right in front of the King of Kings himself—what a spot for a show like that! The whole town is in a panic—and then you smack those bombers! You've got 'em het up to the point of frenzy! They're like maniacs—dancing in the light of the fire burning up the city—dancing over the bodies of the dead!"

His voice halted, trailed away. The strap came away from Jeff Rolfe's belly. As it came away, Rolfe fell forward in the seat. His head struck against the forward crash pad. His neck seemed limp.

He put out his hands slowly and pushed himself erect. The grim smile was still around his mouth, but the lips were curling up over the white teeth.

"I'd like to make another landing like that," he said, and his breathing whistled. "Just to—know it was no mistake."

Voices were screaming behind them. Voices of Ethiopian officers and soldiers. "Look! See! He's black—black—black!" The word ripped over the heads of the mob, tossed like a chip on the ocean. It became like a chant. "Black—black."

"Get back, get back!" Morey was screaming at them. But they stood, quivering with the frenzy of joy which possessed them, shuffling in the stepless dance. Staring, white eyes out of black faces, at the figure in the cockpit—at Jeff Rolfe.

And as they stared and shrieked Jeff Rolfe died. There was the pressure of his hand on Ken Morey's hand. A light of pure triumph flooded his eyes. His mouth moved.

"Thank—you—" he said. "Thank you. It *was* a good landing—wasn't it?"

His body slumped down into the seat. Ken Morey fought his way through the mob, away from the side of the Wasp. He was crying. Tears ran

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off his face, and he did not so much as realize the fact.

All through the night ten thousand white burnouses kept watch on the field, black faces and white eyes turned toward that white ship. A great silence fell upon the multitude. Only now and then a crooning, deep voice chanted a few bars of a song older than any written words. Older than Cheops. Older than the Sphinx—older than the walls of Jericho. Chanted softly the threnody of a hero.

And a chorus took up the song, low-toned, reverent.

WHEN the sun came up, burnouse clad soldiers lifted Jefferson Rolfe out of his plane. A carriage of the King of Kings bore him back to the city. They dressed him in the white of Ethiopia, and over him they spread a lion skin mantle to mark his rank, and upon his breast the King of Kings fastened the Star of Ethiopia.

The great multitude stood in silence.

The *Albuna* of the Abyssinian Church, who in Ethiopia is like the Pope of Rome, stood over the body of Jefferson Rolfe and lifted his arms to the heavens. His Egyptian face was enraptured and his eyes were wet. His deep voice, like the voice of a great organ, fell upon the people.

"*Ai*—like a Black Star he arose in the night, and the heat and flame of his passage through the skies ignited the bodies of our enemies."

And from the multitude came the answering deep: "*Ai! Ai!*"

"*Ai*—like a Black Winged Lion of Jehovah did he smite them, our oppressors. Like a Black Winged Angel of Death did he cast them down and trample upon them."

"*Ai! Ai!*"

"Death he did not fear, nor destruction. Into the ranks of the enemies did he throw himself, and his sword of flame cut a mighty swath and fear came into their souls!"

"*Ai! Ai!*"

"And the God of our Fathers hung this Black Star in the Heavens as a sign, and through his servant Rolfe spoke unto us: 'Fear ye not, ye children of Ethiopia, for as this my servant has humbled well the pride of thine enemies, so will I also deliver them into thine hands, and I will not suffer thee to be enslaved.'"

"*Ai! Ai!*"

"And we will build a temple of black basalt, higher than any temple, and in it we will place what the God of our Fathers has left to us of His servant, Rolfe. And our children shall come and stand before the temple and lower their eyes. And they shall say among themselves, even as we say: 'This was the Black Star which hung in the night sky over Addis Ababa as a sign to all the people. And under the sign did the people conquer. And under the sign did they go forward, unafraid.'"

"*Ai! Ai!*"

And when the *Albuna* was done, then did the emperor stand over Jefferson Rolfe, in his hands the sceptre of the King of Kings. And he touched the body of Jefferson Rolfe lightly with the golden sceptre, and said: "I create thee *Ras* of Ethiopia. Thou art noble, and those of thy blood—since the beginning of time!"

And they bore him away to the Great Church, and placed him before the altar.

And the people of Addis Ababa looked up at the heavens and were unafraid, and they scattered from the city and took up abode in the open places where the death from the bellies of the enemy planes could not harm them.

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But on the frontiers the soldiers of Ethiopia, amid the rocks of the mountains, and the trees of the forests, fought like inspired men, for the tale of the coming of the Black Star had spread among them. And it seemed that the very animals and insects of the earth and air fought for them, and the sun in the heavens grew white with a great heat and withered the might of the enemy, and sickness and despair fell upon them. And the fierce charging cavalry struck them, and the curved blades whistled and sang through the air. And the earth was strewn with the enemy dead.

AND often Ras Tafari paused in his endless pacing in the courtyard of the palace and his eyes sought out the dome of the Great Church, and a strange light came into his eyes. For the miracle Ras Tafari had sought had been granted him. For a breathless moment a Black Star had been suspended in dazzling brilliance in the Ethiopian heavens, and the centuries of Ethiopian independence were secure.

And sometimes in the night strange dreams came to Ken Morey also. Dreams in which golden helmets and golden boots appeared to him—a river with a crazy plane floating on the tide—and then a voice, exultant in its very agony, whispered—"it *was* a good landing."

And something would take Ken Morey by the throat and strangle his breath and awaken him, and his eyes would look out of the window toward the heavens, toward the stars. As if he sought to locate one star among the myriad galaxies which were strewn across the heavens of Ethiopia.

THE END

The Valuable Coyote

FOR nearly twenty years now the coyote has been trapped for its fur. After certain coarse hairs have been pulled out, the coyote makes an excellent raccoon coat.

—*J. W. Holden.*

MY STORY
by Norma Millen

Her Own Story Published for the First Time Anywhere.

The tragic story of the girl-bride of Murton Millen the murderer.

POIGNANT, DRAMATIC, GRIPPING, AND TRUE.

She was eighteen years old, the lovely daughter of a minister, and she married a man who, with a brother Irving and the collegian, Abel Faber, was arrested for the hold-up of the Needham Trust Co., and the murder of two policemen. They had left a bloody trail behind them in other hold-ups too. The three went to the chair. Norma Millen went to Dedham jail.

She is the enigma of the Millen case. Is she innocent or guilty? Here is one of the greatest true stories ever published.

Read it in the November 9th issue of

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

10c —ON SALE WEDNESDAY, OCT. 30th— **10c**

Norma Millen

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While police hunted for Wayne Seebree's murderer, Tom Eagle was giving them a weird lesson in detecting crime

The shot knocked Eagle forward

Eagle's Eye

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WAYNE SEEBREE'S valet, Slake, was an ever present reminder to Seebree of their first meeting nine years previously on the South Seas tramp steamer, Tonga Belle. Seebree had been picked up from a deserted island on which he had been stranded for seven months. But he had not been alone! Gerry Howden, wealthy New Yorker, had been stranded with him when Howden's yacht was wrecked, but Seebree said nothing about the other man when he was rescued. Howden had been tending a beacon on the other side of the island. Aboard ship, the wily Slake had noticed a court-plaster pasted on Seebree's back—at a spot which Seebree's hands could not reach! That bit of observation was to prove profitable and disastrous to Slake.

Now nine years later, Seebree thought that Howden could hardly have survived on Skull Island. And he had married Howden's widow, Corrine, who had made him president of Howden Motors, and a big name in New York financial circles.

Corrine had never liked Slake, and wondered why her husband ever employed him as a valet. One night Slake asks Seebree for a cool hundred thousand dollars, and Seebree decides that he will have to do away with Slake. So while Slake is out at Jersey Elms, the secluded country home of Seebree's, Wayne shoots him.

Unfortunately there is a coincidental murder of a young girl, Flora Sawyer, who was employed by the Seebrees during the

This story began in the Argosy for October 19

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summer months. Her body is found not far from Slake's. Tom Eagle, District Attorney of this rural New Jersey county, and alert keen Cherokee Indian, undertakes a minute investigation of the murders.

A few days later Seebree sees none other than Gerry Howden standing in the corridor of the Howden building in New York. Unnerved by this reminder of the past, Seebree hires Ray Pritchie as a bodyguard, and decides that he must beat exposure by taking speedy flight. Seebree makes the rounds of the banks in which he holds joint accounts with his wife, and goes to Jersey Elms. After seeing Howden's face peering at him and haunting him, he decides to leave Jersey Elms by car. He is killed by an unknown assailant, and Tom Eagle finds the body just as Eagle had begun to suspect Seebree of murdering Slake.

CHAPTER XIII (*Continued*).

FOOTPRINTS IN THE FOREST.

THEY entered the house and saw tracks in the dust on every rug. Eagle found tracks of Seebree. He also found tracks of a woman. The man and woman had gone to practically every room on both floors. The edges of a sandwich and a stained coffee cup were in the kitchen.

A bed upstairs was disarranged, although the covers were not turned back. "And look there!" exclaimed Pryde. He pointed to a double barreled shotgun which lay on the bed.

Eagle found both barrels of it loaded.

"Seebree spent the night here, I think," he said. "I mean night before last. He appears to have been dead at least twelve hours."

"What about the woman?"

"We can't tell whether she came with him or arrived later. Perhaps Seebree, having murdered Slake, himself feared an assault. So he came here and hid overnight."

Nothing more could be found in the house. While Eagle was searching it, Pryde telephoned for the coroner and transportation. Coroner DeQuince and Sheriff Jarlow arrived promptly, in separate cars.

Eagle remained only long enough to get an opinion from DeQuince.

"He was shot about sundown yesterday, I make it," the coroner said. "With a pistol. No bullet in him or in the garage. I imagine the slug went off into space and won't be found."

Eagle borrowed one of the cars and drove alone toward Kittatinny. In three miles he came to the Sawyer farm. Stopping there to make inquiries, he found an undertaker's rig at the door. A coffin was being lifted into it.

Sawyer stood by with his head bowed. "I'm taking Flora away," he said dismally. "We used to live in Nebraska. So I'm gonna lay her away there, aside of her mother."

Eagle nodded in sympathy. Nevertheless the situation troubled him a little. Although it was difficult to deny Sawyer's right to take the daughter's body West, the fact remained that both her own and Seebree's deaths were unsolved. Apparently Sawyer was in no way connected except that someone in his house had made a notation of a license number on one of the Seebree cars.

"Where in Nebraska?" Eagle asked.

"North Fork," the farmer said.

Eagle made a note of it.

"Did you notice who drove by here yesterday?"

"A lady drove by about four in the afternoon," Sawyer said. "Hour or so later I seen a taxi go by. Didn't notice who was in it."

"Was the lady alone?"

"Seems to me she was. I didn't pay much attention."

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"You'd seen here before?"

"Strikes me I seen her at the inquest Wednesday. But don't bank on that. Maybe I didn't."

"Which way was she driving?"

"West."

"Did she pass again later, going east?"

"If she did I wasn't lookin'. The taxi did, though, 'long about sundown."

"Stop by my office on the way to your train, please," Eagle said. "I may have a few more questions."

WHEN Eagle reached the courthouse, Nell Hope was still there. News had reached her of Seebree's fate, so she realized there would be no rest for Eagle this Sunday. "Good thing I stuck around, major," she said. "Because a witness came out from New York. He called at your house and was sent here."

"Another trainman?"

"Heavens, no! This one wears a hundred dollar suit and smokes cigarettes in an ivory holder. He looks like a cross between a croupier and a gigolo. He says his name's Ray Fritchie, and honest, he tried to make a date with me."

Ray Fritchie was ushered in.

"You're the D.A. out here, are you?" he asked breezily. "Well, I'm a little worried about my employer, Wayne Seebree. He's disappeared."

Eagle asked cautiously, "When did you see him last?"

"Day before yesterday at his New York office."

"Why do you inquire out here?"

Fritchie blew smoke and shrugged his slim shoulders. "Well, I understand he has a house somewhere in this county. One of his cars is gone, so he might have driven out here."

Eagle waited, eying the man shrewdly.

"And hang it," Fritchie went on, "there's something screwy about the whole business. Seebree spent all Friday morning drawing cash out of his bank. Bales of it. And now his office can't find him."

"*I* have just found him," Eagle said quietly. "He was shot dead last night at his country house six miles west of here."

Fritchie's well groomed face registered surprise. But Eagle was not certain whether or not the surprise was real. All the while he was trying to place the name of "Ray Fritchie." Somewhere he had heard it before.

"Dead!" cried Fritchie. "Who shot him?"

"What was your relation to him?" Eagle countered.

"Confidential secretary."

"Since when?"

"Since Tuesday of this week."

Tuesday, Eagle remembered, was the day after Slake's murder. Then his mind placed Fritchie.

"You mean you posed as a confidential secretary," he suggested, "but actually were employed as a bodyguard."

Fritchie compressed his lips. He neither affirmed nor denied the statement. Eagle had just recalled a recent scandal in Wall Street wherein a sleek secretary named Fritchie had proved to be nothing more nor less than a bodyguard.

"Monday night Seebree's valet was murdered at Jersey Elms," Eagle said. "The next day Seebree hired you as a bodyguard. Two days later he drew large sums from banks. Saturday at sundown he was killed."

Fritchie averted his eyes from Eagle's.

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"What else can you tell me?" Eagle asked.

"Not a thing," Fritchie said. His face was now stubborn and steel-hard.

EAGLE interviewed him persistently, but without further success. Then he made a note of the man's New York address.

"I'll get in touch with you later, Mr. Fritchie."

"I'll be around," Fritchie promised, and left the office.

Eagle rang for Nell Hope. "Find out if Ray Fritchie has a police record in New York, please."

"Very well, major. Right now that farmer, Alvin Sawyer, is outside. He says he's on his way to a train, but you asked him to report by here first."

"Send him in."

Sawyer came in. He was dressed for travelling, Eagle saw. He understood that the man was leaving immediately for North Fork, Nebraska, with the body of his daughter.

"When does your train leave?" Eagle asked kindly.

"In about an hour. My baggage is at the depot."

"That will give you time to sign a statement which can be read at the Seebree inquest. I mean you can describe those cars which passed your farm yesterday—the taxi, and the car with the woman in it."

Sawyer made no objection. Eagle promptly called Miss Hope and told her to take a dictated statement from Sawyer. Then he excused himself and hurried to a telephone in his outer office.

He called a number.

A judge of the district court answered him.

"Judge," Eagle said, "I want a warrant to search a man's baggage. It's an emergency, please. Can you execute it right away? Thank you."

After giving details, Eagle next rang up a deputy sheriff. He told the deputy to pick up the search warrant and take it to the railroad depot.

"Alvin Sawyer has baggage at the depot. Please search it without disarranging anything. He's being held at my office for an hour on the excuse of a deposition."

Eagle himself crossed the street to the town's leading mortuary.

"You embalmed the body of Flora Sawyer, did you?" he asked.

"We did," the mortician said.

"You sealed the coffin yourself?"

"I saw it done. Why?"

"Can you guarantee nothing's in it that shouldn't be?"

The mortician was amazed. "Of course I can!" he exclaimed.

Eagle hurried back to the courthouse. In a little while the deputy called him from the depot. He reported that Alvin Sawyer's baggage was as it should be.

"And he'll never know I've been through it," the deputy said.

"I thought it would be all in order," Eagle explained. "But it appears that a large amount of cash is missing in the Seebree case. So I didn't feel justified in letting Sawyer go West without a search."

HE entered his private office and dismissed Sawyer.

Fifteen minutes later he heard the man's train pull out of town. Then Coroner DeQuince came in with a queer expression on his face.

"We picked up something, Major."

"What and where?" Eagle asked.

"Seebree's killer left a card at the crime. What gets me is that it wasn't *his* card but *mine*." DeQuince grimaced

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wryly. He handed a plain business card to Eagle, adding, "It was on the ground not ten yards from Seebree's body."

The printing on the card was,

OTTO DEQUINCE,
County Coroner.

"The nerve of him," complained DeQuince. "It's one of a batch I had made only this week. Tuesday, to be exact. They were delivered just before the Slake-Sawyer inquest; and a stack of 'em were on my table all during that inquest."

"You mean that someone who attended the inquest picked up one of the cards?"

"Either then or later," DeQuince said. "And it turns up by Seebree's corpse. Whoever picked the card up used it to jot down the license number of a New Hampshire car."

Eagle turned the card over. On its other side was printed in pencil: "N. H. 14-169."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN FROM SKULL ISLAND.

NELL HOPE came in and reported, "New York says that Ray Fritchie has no official police record. He has a license to carry a gun, though, and is understood to be a professional bodyguard."

"Thank you," Eagle said. "Now, please wire the state bureau of motor vehicle registration at Concord, New Hampshire. Ask for the name of the owner of car N. H. 14-169."

"You're going out, major?"

Eagle was putting on his hat. "Yes. I'm driving to New York to see Mrs. Seebree."

As Eagle was about to leave his office, a red-cheeked boy was coming in. The boy was about twelve years old.

"Say, major, you promised you'd autograph a book for me."

"I most certainly did, Chester," Eagle answered heartily.

Here was a member of the local Boy Scout troop, an organization of which Eagle was state commander. Boy Scout sponsoring was one of Eagle's pet hobbies.

As busy as he was just then, he nevertheless turned back to his desk to get the promised book. He recalled autographing it for Chester only yesterday.

But now he failed to find it on his desk.

"I'm sure I put it right here, Chet," Eagle said, mildly puzzled. "But, never mind; I'll get you another one." From a cabinet he produced another copy of the book. Its title page read:

TRICKS WITH STICKS

Secrets of Indian Woodcraft
by Tom Eagle

Dedicated to the Boy Scouts of America

Eagle dedicated the book, and Chester went proudly away with it. Two hours later, after a fast drive, Eagle was in New York. He arrived in front of the Seebree residence just in time to see Ray Fritchie turn in at the walk there.

"Hello, Eagle. I see you caught up with me," Fritchie greeted. "You've come to break the bad news?"

Eagle nodded. He presumed that Corrine Seebree did not yet know of Wayne Seebree's death.

"And you?" he asked Fritchie.

"Me? I came to get my stuff. I've

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been living here since Tuesday, you know."

Riggs admitted them to the house. Eagle presented his card and asked to see Mrs. Seebree. Riggs returned in a moment and reported:

"The madam is extremely upset. Unless it is very important, will you call later?"

"It is extraordinarily important," Eagle assured him.

He was shown into a sun parlor, where the appearance of Corrine Seebree shocked him. She was dishevelled. Her brilliant red hair was in disarray. Her face was streaked with tears. Her eyes had a stunned look, which convinced Eagle that she must have heard about Seebree.

She did not ask Eagle to sit down. She only stared dully at him, then past him at Fritchie, who had followed to the room.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Seebree," Eagle said gently.

"I'm *not* Mrs. Seebree!" She shrieked the denial in a crazy hysteria. Her hands clenched.

Eagle was amazed. "I beg your pardon. But you testified as Mrs. Seebree last Wednesday at an inquest."

"Yes, and I made a terrible mistake," she said.

Her chin drooped.

Eagle, confused, tried to read the strange conflict of emotions on her face. Everything was there, he thought—grief, remorse, joy, anger! Some strange mixture ruled her, as though the strings of a thousand dreams were pulling at her heart.

"You know about your husband?" Eagle asked.

"Yes, I know."

The shock left her half insane, Eagle supposed.

Before he could speak further she cried wildly, "And I thought he was dead!"

"But he is!" Eagle said.

"He's *not!*" The denial came emphatic and fierce this time. "He lives. He's in this house right now."

That, to Eagle, made it clear she was mad.

She was on her feet, swaying. He took her arm and urged softly, "Won't you please sit down?"

SHE sank into deep cushions, hid her face and began crying. And again, strangely, Eagle caught a lilt of joy mixed with her distress. She raised her face, and he saw that it was glowing through the tears.

"For nine years I've thought him dead. But he isn't. Why do you say he is?"

"Wayne Seebree," Eagle announced quietly, "was killed last night at Jersey Elms."

Her lips parted and she stared at him. "Who killed him?"

"We do not know. Why do you say he is here?"

She raised her voice and spoke to the butler. "Riggs, if Mr. Howden is ready, please call him."

"The master has just finished dressing, ma'am," Riggs said. "He's coming down now."

Descending steps could be heard. Then a tall, gaunt man came in. His clothes fit him loosely. He had the manner of one strange to his surroundings. His hair, by the pallor at the edges of it, had just been cut. He stood awkwardly in the doorway, with an uncertain stare at Eagle.

"This is my husband, Gerald Howden," Corrine said.

She went to him and took his arm. Then her red head was on his shoulder and again she was crying.

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In a flood the narrative told by Skipper Jones at the inquest came back to Eagle. Also he remembered the news accounts of nine years ago, wherein Gerald Howden, multimillionaire motor magnate, had been drowned after the wreck of his yacht.

Quickly he understood that there had been an outrageous deception, with Wayne Seebree at the bottom of it. Seebree must have plotted successfully to usurp Howden's place in life.

"I should not intrude longer," Eagle said. "And I wouldn't, except for the necessity of clearing up the murder of Wayne Seebree."

Howden looked quickly over his wife's shoulder. In an unsure voice he exclaimed, "Seebree? M u r d e r e d? When?"

"Last night at Jersey Elms. I'm the district attorney out there, and am compelled to ask questions."

"Oh!" Howden said vacantly.

Corrine drew him to a divan. She sat down there with an arm around him.

A certain hardness had come to Howden's face at mention of Seebree's name. Eagle gazed at the man searchingly.

He realized that Howden himself might have killed Seebree. Surely no man alive could have such an impelling motive.

First, however, Eagle addressed himself to Corrine. "Mrs. Seebree—I mean Mrs. Howden, when did you first learn about Mr. Howden's safe return?"

"I came back from a motor trip at noon yesterday," she said, "and stopped at the Howden Building. I was going up to see Mr. Seebree."

"Did you go up to see him?"

"No. Because in the lobby of the building I saw Gerry. I only saw him for a moment, and it stunned me. Then I lost him in the crowd."

"What did you do?"

"I CAME home in a daze. Then I realized that I must see Wayne. I had to tell Wayne our impossible situation, because Gerald was alive. I had Riggs telephone the office. Wayne wasn't there, and hadn't been seen since the day before. I tried his clubs. Finally I tried Jersey Elms. No one answered, but the exchange girl at Kittatinny said she thought someone was there."

"You drove out there?" Eagle asked, remembering Sawyer's statement that a woman driving alone had passed his farm.

"Yes. But he wasn't there. Or if he was, I couldn't find him. When I arrived back home, Gilbert and Estelle told me I must have been mistaken. It was absurd, they said, to think Gerry could be alive."

"Who are Gilbert and Estelle?"

"The Chardells, my guests. But they were wrong. Because early this morning Gerry knocked at the door. I've been crazy ever since."

It checked with Sawyer's story on another score, Eagle realized, because Corrine had attended the Wednesday inquest. "Strikes me I seen her at the inquest," Sawyer had said in describing the woman who drove alone past his farm yesterday.

"What time were you at Jersey Elms yesterday, Mrs. Howden?"

"It was late in the afternoon, I suppose."

"Did you pass a taxi on the road?"

"If I did, I didn't notice it."

Riggs came in with a confused look on his face.

"Pardon me," he said. "But a clerk at the office is telephoning. He wants

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to know if Mrs. Seebree is safe at home. Beg pardon, I mean Mrs. Howden."

The term "safe" led Eagle to say quickly, "Please let me talk to that clerk."

At the telephone he said, "Yes, Mrs. Seebree is safe at home. Why do you ask?"

He heard a sigh of relief. Then the clerk inquired, "Did Mr. Seebree pay the ransom?"

"Why would he pay a ransom?"

"Mrs. Seebree was kidnaped, wasn't she?"

"What makes you think so, and who are you?"

"I'm Eddie Cooper. Mr. Seebree told me his wife was kidnaped, and to bring two hundred thousand dollars in a taxi."

"To him at Jersey Elms?"

"Yes."

"And did you?"

"Sure. I gave it to him there at about five-thirty yesterday."

Eagle said slowly, "Very well, Mr. Cooper. Keep quiet about it, please, until I have time to see you."

Money and more money! Fritchie had already mentioned a hundred thousand drawn from banks Thursday morning. Evidently Seebree had used every means to get hands on cash. He must have planned to skip with it, Eagle reasoned, having himself observed the strange resurrection of Gerald Howden.

Back in the sun parlor he faced Howden. "Your adventure is bound to bear on Seebree's death. Will you give it to me now, please?"

"I'm out of practice, talking," Howden said with a pale smile. "For eight years I never spoke a word."

"You lived that long alone on Skull Island?"

"Yes. The first seven months I was there with Seebree. I thought he was my friend. He and I and Corrine were raised together. He was best man at our wedding."

"What happened?"

HOWDEN spoke slowly, awkwardly. Every moment or so he looked at his wife for encouragement. She still sat with an arm around him.

He explained that he and Seebree, alone of the yacht's company, had reached the beach of a reef-bound island. On its summit they made a rock house, living on fruit and yams.

"Seebree," Howden said, "kept up a signal fire on one side of the island, while I did the same on the other. Each was to call the other if a ship was sighted. A ship did sight Seebree's signal, and took him off. He said nothing about me."

A bitterness crept into the derelict's voice, and his last words came fiercely. Again Eagle could see that revenge on Seebree might easily have been Howden's ruling passion when arriving back home.

"You went over to Seebree's side of the island and found him gone, and marks where a boat had been beached?"

"Yes."

"How long since you had seen him?"

We were together always at night, in the rock house. Only the night before I had used adhesive tape from my first-aid kit to patch a thorn scratch on Seebree's back.

"You remained then how long on the island?"

"I lost track of time," Howden said grimly. "By the calendar now I know it was about eight years. Then a

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Polynesian yawl was driven there by a rough sea. They found me with a fever, half out of my mind. They took me to their own island, but it was some months before I was sound."

"What ship brought you to the States?"

"A Norwegian tramp. The skipper was the only one of the crew who spoke English. When I told him I was Gerald Howden it meant nothing at all to him. I landed at San Francisco with twenty dollars, my pay as a deck hand. I was ragged and hairy. I went to a bank. When I told them I was president of Howden Motors, Incorporated, they thought I was crazy."

Eagle smiled. He could easily believe it.

"I rode freights to New York," Howden asserted, and again his voice was bitter.

"Arriving when?"

"Last Tuesday."

THAT, Eagle reflected, was the day after Slake's murder. It meant that Slake himself could not have seen Howden. Therefore the crisis which led Seebree to murder Slake must have been something else than the fact of Howden's return.

"If you arrived Tuesday," Eagle asked, "why did you wait until Sunday before coming home?"

"By then I knew that Corrine, believing me dead, had married Seebree. My sudden appearance would shock her. As for Seebree, I was willing enough to shock *him*. I faced him at every turn for three days. Each time he turned pale, like the belly of a fish. Guilt made him a coward. I thought he would run away, and hoped he would; because that would make it simpler for Corrine.

"Also," Howden explained, "I wasn't sure of myself. I was like a South Seas savage on the streets of New York. Every sight was strange; even my own voice was strange to me. And that rebuff at the San Francisco bank helped make me slow and timid about coming forward.

"Each passing day, though, gave me a better grip. I wanted to be at my best before facing Corrine."

"So you waited until this morning. In that time did you speak to Seebree?"

"No. I saw him often enough, though. Most of the time I hung around my own building. It helped me get back into myself. And it gave me the satisfaction of seeing Seebree's knees shake. I got back confidence, too, by standing in front of my own club. I was too ragged to go in, of course. But I saw Seebree come out. I went also to both of my houses."

The last confession made Eagle alert. "You mean this one and Jersey Elms?"

"Yes."

"When were you at the country house?"

"Friday after dark."

"Did you see Seebree there?"

"Yes. Hiding like a rat."

"And yesterday?"

"I was in the city yesterday. In the lobby of the Howden Building I came face to face with Corrine. Then I knew I must come home. I didn't feel like being rebuffed again by incredulous bankers. So I spent my last quarter for a haircut, and this morning came home."

Corrine said with a break in her voice, "And what a shock! I almost set the dogs on him!"

Eagle heard others coming. In a moment the Chardells came into the room.

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"You'll be stormed by reporters, Corrine!" Estelle cried gaily. "Gilbert and I have spilled the news all over town."

"You only spilled part of it," Ray Fritchie inserted. He had been standing by all the while. "Wait till they hear about Seebree's murder!"

"What!" Estelle cried. "Seebree murdered! Why, that's terrible!"

Eagle, during a volley of questions from the Chardells, stood appraising this couple shrewdly. The woman, he thought, was genuinely shocked. He could read no guile in her delicate, blond face.

Of Gilbert Chardell he was less sure. Eagle could not bring himself to trust Chardell. The man was, he thought, a predatory type; a handsome, elegant confidence man with some insidious motive of profit always in mind.

Eagle realized that he himself should be leaving, so he asked two blunt questions.

"Mr. Howden, did you kill the man who wronged you—Wayne Seebree?"

"No," Howden answered him, with a clamp of his jaws.

"Did you, Mrs. Howden?" Eagle asked.

"I? Of course not," she said.

"How perfectly absurd!" exclaimed Estelle Chardell.

Chardell said nothing, but a faintly derisive light came to his eyes.

"It's easy enough to figure out who *did* shoot him," Ray Fritchie offered, with a leer. He pointed a finger directly at Chardell. "There's the man you want, Mr. Eagle."

Chardell blanched. "You're crazy! I didn't do it," he denied. "I wasn't out there."

"Out where?" Eagle asked softly. "I don't think we've mentioned the scene of the crime yet."

Chardell compressed his lips. He stood staring venomously at Fritchie.

Fritchie's voice had a bitter spite in it. "This smoothie, Chardell, has been trying for a week to touch Seebree. He wanted two or three hundred grand for some phony option. Yesterday the option was to expire. So Chardell went to Jersey Elms for a last dig at Seebree. Seebree was there with the money, but he wasn't planning on handing it to Chardell. Now Seebree's dead—and the money's gone. Figure it out yourself, Eagle."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MISSING MONEY.

EAGLE left to pay a call on the New York police. An inspector of police offered him every cooperation. Late this Sunday evening the tellers of five banks were summoned to telephones. The heads of four brokerage firms were likewise summoned. In a short while the police were able to give Eagle the exact amounts of cash raised by Wayne Seebree during the last few days of his life. The total was three hundred thousand dollars.

Two-thirds of it had been delivered to him by the gullible clerk, Eddie Cooper, a bare hour or so before Seebree's death. The other third Seebree had evidently taken with him from New York.

Extras were on the New York streets by dark Sunday. The Monday morning papers shrieked headlines about Seebree and about Howden.

Pictures of the haggard Howden were published side by side with pictures of him as a popular young clubman of ten years ago.

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Back in his New Jersey office Monday morning, Major Eagle studied those published photographs carefully. What caused him to do so was an undertone of doubt in some of the journalistic comments. Such challenging phrases as "Assuming that the forlorn derelict is really the long-missing Gerald Howden," or "It is generally accepted that the man from Skull Island is not an impostor, but actually Gerald Howden."

An imposition, Eagle thought, would be impossible without the connivance of Corrine Howden. Surely any woman would know her own husband, even after nine years. Or after thirty years, for that matter. Therefore an impostor could hardly deceive Corrine. Howden, Eagle learned, had no living blood kindred. Hundreds of people here in New York had known him ten years ago, but among these, according to the news items, there were those who expressed doubt.

Old friends were cautious. Many bankers and lawyers were openly suspicious. A forty-million-dollars fortune was at stake. Therefore inevitably came a whispering undertone, asking, "Is this man really Howden?"

"It's another argument for universal fingerprinting, Miss Hope," Eagle said. His pretty secretary was seated on the arm of his chair, helping him inspect the "before and after" pictures of Howden. "This account says that no old fingerprints of Howden are available."

"Usually," Nell suggested, "a face doesn't change much in nine years."

"But these nine years were extraordinary," Eagle pointed out. "They were equal to half a lifetime in effects of exposure. They seared Howden, hardened him, roughened him, at seasons emaciated him and pitted him with disease. He was climbing trees every day for nuts, digging clams with his bare fingers. Nine years like that is the curtain between the two Howdens."

Nell Hope beamed with a bright idea. "Why don't you take a cruise down to that island, major? You're long overdue for a vacation, anyway. You could look over that rock house Howden says he built and lived in. I'll bet you could prove or disprove his identity."

A flush came to the high Indian cheekbones of Tom Eagle. Nothing could suit him better than to prowl through the jungles of that island. But he shook his head.

"But you really ought to go," Nell persisted. "You have three perfectly good deputy district attorneys who could carry on here at home. As it stands, there always will be a few doubters about Mr. Howden. Personally I'm sure he's all right. But the whisper of doubt ought to be checked definitely. It's a cloud over the Howdens, and it isn't fair."

AGAIN Eagle shook his head. "I'm not justified in going to Skull Island, Miss Hope. Since the man's wife accepts him, that should settle it. Also, we must remember that the person who knew Howden best, next to his wife, was Seebree. And the returning man was so like Howden that he frightened Seebree away. No, I'd better stay home and clear up the murders of Seebree and Flora Sawyer."

"And the murder of Slake," Nell Hope added.

"That one, I think, is already solved. Seebree shot Slake."

"How do you know?"

"Footprints in the forest," the In-

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dian explained with a smile. Then his eyes grew grim again. They were fixed upon a headline which referred to all three deaths as "The Skull Island Murders."

And Eagle himself was of the opinion that the tragedies to the valet, to the farm girl and to Wayne Seebree all took root in the desertion of Howden on Skull Island. Always, in the unraveling of a crime, Eagle was on the lookout for a backlog. A first and solid chunk of villainy from which others sprung. Surely in this case, as sensed immediately by the headline writers, the backlog was Skull Island. Eagle wanted to see and explore that remote wilderness more than he was willing to admit.

Nell Hope, reading the wistfulness in his black eyes, urged again, "You really ought to go, major. You and your woodcraft!" She laughed. "The tall uncut always was your first love, and you know it."

Eagle again said no, and forced himself to consider things nearer. "We haven't even made a good guess about who shot Flora Sawyer," he said. "And the only clew found at the Seebree crime is this card."

He brought from his pocket a business card of Coroner Otto DeQuince. On its other side was printed in pencil "N. H. 14-169."

"That reminds me, I got an answer from Concord," Nell Hope said. "The owner of the car bearing that license number is William Bass of Portsmouth, New Hampshire."

The card struck Eagle as important. So immediately he went by train to Portsmouth. There he readily found William Bass, who was an elderly fisherman. His speech and rugged face indicated that he had spent most of his life at sea.

William Bass admitted owning a flivver touring car whose license number was N. H. 14-169.

"Have you been in New Jersey with this car recently, Mr. Bass?"

"New Jersey? Never was there in my life," Bass said. He squinted curiously at his caller.

"Did you ever take a cruise in the South Seas?"

"Aye, mate. I been all over the world in my time. What's it about, anyway?"

Eagle displayed pictures of Seebree, Howden, Chardell, Fritchie, and the Sawyer family. Bass said that all the faces were strange to him. Eagle interviewed him for an hour without developing a single point which connected with the murders.

Then he left for New York.

IN the city he called again on the Howdens. Reporters were swarming there, but few of these had been given an audience with Howden.

Or even with Corrine, for the news accounts expressing doubt of Howden's identity had angered her.

However, she was cordial to Eagle and invited him to stay for dinner.

"What do you think, Mr. Eagle!" she exclaimed with heat. "There are a few silly people who talk as though Gerry isn't really Gerry. As though I wouldn't know him! It's maddening!"

"Perhaps it's too big a chance for a mystery for the tabloids to pass up," Eagle suggested. "Some of them would hint at an imposition just for the sensation of it."

Today Howden was more sure of himself. He talked at length with Eagle, gave Eagle a hundred intimate details of his nine-year sojourn on Skull Island.

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"Do we positively *have* to go to that terrible inquest tomorrow?" Corrine protested as Eagle was leaving.

"I'm afraid it's quite necessary," Eagle said. He was aware that DeQuince had notified the Howdens, the Chardells, and Ray Fritchie, as well as Eddie Cooper, to appear at the official Seebree inquiry.

The inquest brought to light nothing new. Sensational publicity smothered it. News reel men and reporters came in droves. A mob of curious packed itself in. Corrine Howden, heavily veiled and clinging to Howden's arm, came and left with an escort of state police.

"A perfect madhouse!" Nell Hope whispered to Eagle.

Eagle asked no questions of the witnesses. But he stood by, sharply appraising them all, especially Gilbert Chardell. Chardell was accused of the Seebree shooting by Fritchie, but Fritchie offered no proof. Both of those fellows were opportunists, Eagle thought.

DeQuince quizzed Chardell about the realty speculation on which he had sought the backing of Seebree.

"It was a peach," Chardell testified glibly, "but the deal fell through. Seebree wouldn't let me have the money, and I couldn't get it anywhere else."

"Where were you from six to eight Saturday evening?"

"I was at a movie on Broadway," Chardell asserted.

"By yourself?"

"That's right. After that I went to see a friend uptown, but he wasn't at home."

It was a ridiculously weak alibi, Eagle thought. Fritchie's was not much better.

"I had been looking all day for Mr. Seebree," Fritchie said. "Late Saturday afternoon I got an idea he might have taken a train out to Kittatinny. If so, he would return by train. So I went to the Pennsylvania Station and stood at the gate watching incoming trains from here. When he didn't show up on the 7.55, I went home."

"Did you speak to anyone at the station?"

"Not that I remember."

Gerald Howden, although admitting he had been to Jersey Elms Friday night, insisted that he had been walking the streets of New York Saturday evening. Corrine admitted that she had been at Jersey Elms between four and five Saturday. Eddie Cooper testified that he saw Seebree alive at five-thirty.

"A total washout!" Coroner DeQuince grumbled to Eagle when the inquest was over. "My slant is that Howden killed him after brooding nine years about the man's treachery."

SHERIFF JARLOW inserted a wise tongue in his cheek. "The wife has a nice crop o' red hair," he said. "Bet she was hoppin' mad when she found out about the way Seebree'd been foolin' her."

"Murder for the money is a little more plausible," Eagle suggested. "Fritchie knew he had it. And Chardell for days had been pestering him for a loan."

Before retiring that night Eagle detailed two deputies to follow Fritchie and Chardell back to New York, and to report on their movements. At breakfast the next morning his telephone rang. It was one of the deputies calling from New York.

"We lost track of that bird Fritchie," the man said. "We saw him check in at a hotel last night. This morning he was gone."

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"Did he leave a forwarding address?'

"No. He just told the hotel clerk he was leaving town on business. Told them to hold his mail. We can't get any line on him at all."

"What about Chardell?"

"The Chardells moved from the Howdens' house to an apartment. They're there now."

"Very well. Try to trace Fritchie."

This morning Eagle had an important case of prosecution in court. Reluctantly he was forced to leave the Seebree-Howden investigations in the hands of Jarlow and Pryde.

Two days later the district attorney was again free.

"Has Jarlow uncovered anything, Miss Hope?" he asked then.

"Absolutely nothing, major. The Chardells are at home in New York. So are the Howdens. And Fritchie is still missing."

Eagle had considerable confidence in the tact and ability of his secretary. Therefore he sent her to New York to interview Corrine Howden, with the idea that a woman might succeed with a woman where a man might fail.

"Mrs. Howden was lovely to me," Nell Hope said when she came back. "She's in a kind of delirium over the return of Mr. Howden. She admits she was incensed bitterly at Seebree when she first learned the truth, but I can't think she killed him."

"How long has she known the Chardells?"

"Estelle Chardell had been her intimate friend for years. Gilbert Chardell appeared in New York about a year ago and married Estelle. He came from Old Mexico, where he said he was an importer. But if you ask me, I think he never was anything but a slick con man. I think he used Estelle's social connections to get in with the Seebrees."

"Anything more about Slake?"

"Yes, a connection between Slake and Flora Sawyer. Four months ago Flora went to New York and knocked at the kitchen door of the Seebree house. Mrs. Seebree—I mean Mrs. Howden—went into the kitchen and found her talking to the cook. She thought nothing of it. Since Flora was a summer kitchen maid at Jersey Elms, Mrs. Howden assumed that the girl just happened to be shopping in the city and stopped by to visit with the help."

EAGLE'S eyes narrowed shrewdly. "And now it develops that Flora asked to see Slake?"

"Yes, but Slake wasn't there. It happened during the two months that Slake was away on a vacation."

"Slake gone for two months last winter?" Eagle prompted quickly. "Where did he go?"

"No one knows. He simply asked Mrs. Seebree for two months off, and got it."

"On full pay, I imagine," Eagle suggested. "Slake surely knew or guessed the truth about Seebree's desertion of Howden."

"Does what I found out help, major?"

"Yes; it helps me to conclude that Slake, fired from a ship three years ago for traffic in marihuana, kept on peddling that dope; that during the summer months in the country he taught the kitchen maid to use it; that he kept her supplied with it except during the winter months when he was away. And that during that period she became desperate to be re-supplied, so went to New York and asked for Slake at the kitchen door."

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"Where away now, major?"

Eagle had picked up his hat and was starting out.

"To the woods," Eagle said. "I must start with Seebree's murder and work backward."

He embarked in a car and drove west along the macadam which led to Jersey Elms. Halfway there he came to the deserted farm of Alvin Sawyer.

To make sure that Sawyer had not yet returned from Nebraska, Eagle got out and knocked at the farmhouse door. There was no response. He saw no chickens in the barnyard or any live stock in the pasture. That led him to conclude that Sawyer, before leaving, had disposed of his chattel.

Perhaps the man wasn't coming back at all. More than likely this farm was mortgaged for all it was worth, in which case Sawyer could remain away forever without loss.

It was now seven days after the death of Seebree and twelve after the death of Slake. It was six days since Sawyer had gone west with his daughter's coffin.

Eagle frowned. The case seemed to be slipping from his hands. He took from his pocket a paper on which he had jotted down five names and five possible motives in the Seebree case. The list read:

Ray Fritchie—for the money.
Gilbert Chardell—for the money.
Corrine Howden—in bitter resentment.
Gerald Howden—in bitter resentment.
Alvin Sawyer—for the money, or for a motive of resentment connected with the fate of his daughter.

North Fork officials must be long-distanced, Eagle decided, to find out if Alvin Sawyer was still there. In the meantime this locked house might furnish evidence as to whether or not the farmer intended to return. Eagle tried the front door and found it locked. His skeleton key did not fit it.

He went around to the rear door and tried there. It was a cheap lock, and the key turned it. Eagle entered and saw no evidence of permanent desertion. The shabby furnishings were in place. A pair of Sawyer's overalls hung on the back of a chair.

HE went to Sawyer's bedroom. Only a few badly worn work suits and boots were in the closet there. On the table stood a photograph of Sawyer's son, Floyd. Floyd appeared to be a tall, thin young man with indolent eyes. Eagle had heard nothing to the detriment of Floyd Sawyer's character except that he was unsteady, always roving from one job to another. By trade the young man was a mechanic, with a zeal for tinkering with motors.

Eagle found support for this report when he went to Floyd's room. Evidently the room had not been occupied for many months. A dusty stack of trade magazines dealing with gasoline motors was on a shelf. These magazines had been much thumbed. Yet on the table was a small exhibit which indicated the unsteady, restless side of Floyd's character. It was a cube of pink ivory, a dice. Although dice are usually seen in pairs, in this case a second dice was not in sight.

Eagle added the photograph of Floyd to his collection of pictures relating to the Slake-Sawyer-Seebree mystery. Then he went into Flora's room. For a definite purpose he searched it. But he failed to find any evidence that the girl had been addicted to the use of marihuana cigarettes.

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He left the house and locked it. Then he drove on to Jersey Elms. He stood for a long while in front of the garage, gazing at the spot where Seebree's body had been found. Could he start from here and backtrack the crimes?

Then it occurred to him that both the approach and retreat of Seebree's murderer had been assumed to be by vehicle on the macadam. Yet it might not be so. The killer might have approached and retreated on foot through the woods. If so, it still was not too late for his tracks to be found and followed.

Eagle moved a little way into the woods and began a wide circle. He proceeded at a stoop, eyes barely two feet from the ground. Often he dropped to his knees, examining a leaf or twig. Sometimes he crawled. Inch by inch he searched the perimeter of a circle whose center was the Jersey Elms garage. No faint impression escaped him. Just now he could have been one of his Cherokee forbears on the trail of some moccasined enemy.

Halfway around his circle he found a trail of old footprints. But he had seen them before. They were the tracks of Wayne Seebree which, with Pryde, he had traced from the railroad water tank. Now he had no further interest in them, and so moved on.

Ten more paces along the arc of his inspection he found another line of tracks. They were faint and old. No eyes but an Indian's would have noticed them. Yet they were not so old as the tracks from the water tank. And these tracks led not toward, but away from the house at Jersey Elms.

After following them carefully for a short way Eagle saw that they had been made by a running man. The length of pace proved that. Too, he became convinced that the runner had carried a weight in each hand. The heelprints were deeper than the sole prints. This indicated that the heels had been planted first. A man running with free hands, Eagle knew, runs on his toes. But a runner encumbered with a weight runs either flat-footed or on his heels.

It fit the case in hand, Eagle thought. For Seebree at his death had had in his possession two bags of money. Logically this fugitive had made off with those bags. He must have retreated this way from his crime, a bag in each hand.

BENDING low, with his black eyes flashing, Eagle followed. Track by track he followed on through the forest. He came to a fence and saw two rectangular prints in dust there. Evidently the fugitive had set down two suitcases while he climbed through the fence.

Where would the tracks lead? To some neighboring highway beyond the woods, Eagle presumed, where the killer had left his car. Although pursuit at this late day seemed hopeless, still Eagle followed on. More things than footprints might be found on this trail.

Farther along might be tire prints. Or the fugitive, stumbling, might have dropped some physical clew.

In a mile the tracks came to a clearing in the woods. There had once been an old farm here. The wreck of a burned house stood near a caved-in barn. Back of the barn, a granary was still in fair condition. It was to this granary that the fugitive tracks led.

Eagle approached the granary cautiously. He was not armed. District

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Attorney Eagle had a peculiar distaste for pocket arms. A rifle, carried boldly in the hand, was different. It did not, to him, impeach dignity as did a concealed gun. It was an odd prejudice and yet it was rooted firmly in Eagle's Indian mind.

Now, with no arm of defense at all, he approached a door to which led criminal tracks. There was no lock on the crib door. Eagle pulled it open. Years since any grain had been stored here, he saw. Dust covered the floor, except for one board. Absence of dust on that board told him that it had been moved since the last blow of wind.

He found the board loose, raised it and pushed it aside. Beneath were a few old, rotting grain sacks. He removed the sacks. Doing so he exposed two suitcases.

One by one he lifted them out of the cache. The initials W. S. was on each. Wayne Seebree! Eagle opened one of the suitcases. In it he found fat packages of money. Money was also in the other suitcase. Bank wrappers were still on the packages, making a count easy. In a short while Eagle determined there were here about three hundred thousand dollars.

He found something else, too. In a pouch of one of the suitcases were ten packages of queer cigarettes. Eagle sniffed at them. Marihuana! County authorities had once confiscated a shipment of that vicious narcotic. Eagle's sense of smell, hardless less keen than his other senses, immediately identified this as the same dope.

Three hundred thousand dollars and ten packages of marihuana cigarettes!

Wayne Seebree, for the last several years in control of the forty-million-dollar Howden estate, would hardly be concerned in a narcotic traffic. Therefore Eagle assumed that Seebree himself had not stored the dope in these suitcases. Possibly it had been hidden there by Slake, at some time when the valet had made use of these bags, or by the fugitive who had carried the stolen bags to this crib.

That fugitive could be either Chardell, Fritchie or Sawyer. Any one of those men might have considered these initialed suitcases too conspicuous to be taken home. The hazard of a hue and cry directly after the killing of Seebree would be too great. So the guilty man must have elected to rid himself of the loot at the first likely hiding place, planning to return after the hue and cry abated.

He might return now any time. Eagle debated as to the wisdom of leaving the suitcases hidden there, with a heavy guard ambushed in the woods, or taking the bags himself directly to the courthouse.

As he considered these alternatives in deep concentration he was kneeling with his back to the open door of the granary. A pistol shot just outside the door detonated in his ears. The bullet grooved Eagle's scalp. It struck his head like an iron bludgeon and knocked him forward, face down.

He was stunned instantly. He did not see the assailant. Eagle lay there in the granary for more than an hour totally unconscious. His hair, when he came to his senses, was matted with blood. The money bags and the assailant were gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARKED MAN.

EAGLE went to a pump and drew water. He bathed his head. A throbbing ache was there, but the flow of blood was now stopped. A

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bullet had plowed barely more than skin deep down his scalp.

Now his black eyes flashed and a copper red mounted to his cheekbones. At once he took up the trail of fugitive tracks.

This time they were fresh tracks, the tracks of his recent assailant. Again they were the tracks of a runner weighted at both hands. The length of the foot matched the length of the older tracks. This time it was a different shoe, but Eagle made sure it was the same man.

The tracks went on through the woods. Here the man had stumbled. Eagle saw clearly where he had sprawled flat on hands and chin, in the tangle of a creeping vine. From there the tracks led on to a concrete highway. And no farther. Obviously a car had been parked here. Many other cars were speeding by. Eagle sighed. It meant the end of the trail. He walked swiftly back through the woods to the house at Jersey Elms. From there in his own car he drove toward the county seat.

Once more he stopped at the farmhouse of Alvin Sawyer. Again he found it deserted. Yet he conceded that five days would give Sawyer time to reach Nebraska, inter his daughter and return east.

And if Sawyer had hidden the money at the granary, his first thought upon returning home would be to reclaim it. He might even do that before going to his farm. After encountering Eagle at the cache he probably wouldn't go home at all.

At the courthouse Eagle assembled Sheriff Jarlow and all available deputies. He explained his discovery and the loss of the loot.

"Sheriff," he instructed, "please send one man to Sawyer's house to watch and to question, in case he returns. You yourself please long-distance the authorities at North Fork, Nebraska. Ask if Sawyer has left there, and if so on what date."

"I'm right on it," Jarlow promised, and hurried away with one of his men.

"Pryde," Eagle said then, "let's see a new speed record to New York. We can check up on Chardell. If he did it, maybe he'll be bold enough to go home."

Eagle delayed only long enough to have a doctor treat his scalp wound. Then he raced toward New York with Pryde.

"What about Fritchie?" Pryde asked.

"I wish I knew," Eagle said wryly.

In New York they drove directly to the Chardells' apartment. Estelle Chardéll admitted them. She wore gloves; a small, modish hat was perched on her blond hair.

"I was just starting to call on Corrine," she smiled. "Won't you come in?"

"Is your husband here?"

"No. He was, but he just left."

"Where did he go?"

"I've no idea. He came in and asked if there was any mail. There was one letter. Reading it seemed to worry him. Directly after reading it he went out."

"He took the letter with him?" Eagle asked.

"I suppose so. I didn't notice."

"Who was the letter from?"

"Naturally I wouldn't know. It came sealed, of course, and I never open my husband's mail."

Eagle's alert eye fell upon an envelope which lay on the table. It was addressed to Gilbert Chardell, he saw.

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What startled him was the postmark. The letter had been mailed two days ago at North Fork, Nebraska.

"Is this the envelope the letter came in?"

Mrs. Chardell looked at it. "Yes, I believe it is. Why?"

Her expression was a mixture of puzzlement and worry.

Eagle felt suddenly sorry for her. She had clear, honest eyes, and a hurt was there. The shadow of distrust grew on her face.

She came close to Eagle, clutched his arm. "Tell me, is Gilbert in trouble? He has done nothing wrong?"

"I cannot say," Eagle said. "May I have this envelope?"

She made no objection. Eagle put the envelope in his pocket and withdrew with Pryde.

"Bet she never sees him again," Pryde said outside. "Chances are he's beat it."

"This North Fork postmark probably links Chardell with Sawyer," Eagle said. "Please stay here, Pryde. I'll ask the New York police to send you help. You can keep an eye on the apartment in case Chardell comes back."

AFTER a talk with a police inspector who offered full coöperation, Eagle went to see the Howdens. Gerald Howden was upstairs resting. Corrine received Eagle. With her was Estelle Chardell, who had arrived in a state of agitation.

Eagle saw that Estelle had been crying. Corrine Howden sat with a comforting arm around her friend.

"I've been informed that during the past winter Slake took a two months' vacation," Eagle said. "Which two months was he away?"

"January and February, I think," Corrine answered.

"And this is the first of June," Eagle said thoughtfully. "Did he go away alone?"

"I wouldn't know that. Is it important?"

"I'm trying to trace his connections. Do you know what Mr. Seebree paid him as a wage?"

Corrine looked up quickly. "Odd that you ask that, Mr. Eagle. I mentioned the matter myself to Mr. Seebree the last evening Slake was here." She told him of her protest at Slake receiving three hundred a month, as indicated by a check stub. "Mr. Seebree explained that he paid only a third that much, but quarterly."

"Could you find that book of check stubs?"

"I think so."

She went across the hall to a private study. And Eagle, for a word with her apart from Mrs. Chardell, followed.

"Where were the Chardells during January and February?" he asked.

"Let's see." Corrine tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Oh, yes. Just after Christmas, Gilbert said he had to make a business trip to Old Mexico. So he sent Estelle to her mother in Manchester, New Hampshire. She was there until the first week in March, when Gilbert returned."

"It means that Slake and Chardell were away the same two months," Eagle said. "Also, Floyd Sawyer was driving a car for Chardell. He drove Chardell west, and hasn't been seen since."

"That is true. But I hadn't thought of it before," Corrine Howden admitted. "Here's a whole drawer full of Mr. Seebree's personal check stubs, if you want to look at them.

The stubs covered Seebree's private household accounts for years back.

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From them Eagle ascertained that Slake had not been paid quarterly, as alleged, but monthly at the rate of three hundred dollars. Also he had been paid full wages for the two months of winter vacation.

"Petty blackmail by Slake over a long period is fairly clear," Eagle said. "But please don't worry Mrs. Chardell. I can't connect her husband definitely yet. He's gone. But for that matter, so is Fritchie."

Eagle took his leave and hurried back to Kittatinny.

Jarlow greeted him there with a report on the call to Nebraska.

"Sawyer left here Sunday and got to North Fork Tuesday morning. He buried his daughter Tuesday afternoon. Tuesday night he caught a train not east, but west."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He didn't say."

The sheriff shook his head gloomily.

EAGLE easily found an old tax return which had once been filed by Sawyer with the county assessor. The handwriting on it matched the address on the envelope which had enclosed the letter received by Chardell. Definitely Sawyer had communicated with Chardell from North Fork. The envelope was postmarked 6 P.M. Tuesday.

So Sawyer, after burying his daughter and mailing a letter to Chardell, had gone west instead of east! More and more the tangle confused Eagle. He could easily imagine a connection between the dope-peddling Slake and Chardell, with Chardell's mysterious background as an Old Mexico importer, but he could conceive no logical connection between Chardell and Sawyer.

"Unless the farmer thinks Chardell shot the girl," Jarlow suggested, "and so mailed him a threat."

Guesses like that would get them nowhere, Eagle knew. He tried to shake all but known facts from his mind. Those tracks in the woods—they were facts. Could Sawyer have made them? Yes, because the man could have ridden west out of North Fork only as a blind. He could have doubled back and had plenty of time to reach the cache and there assault Eagle.

Then Eagle recalled a definite detail of those tracks. At one place the fugitive had sprawled flat in a tangle of creeping vine. What kind of a vine? It was a vine with slim, reddish leaves! There was a fact. Eagle's mind grasped it as at a straw in a flood of uncertainties.

Immediately he embarked in his car and drove to Jersey Elms. Once again, afoot, he followed the fugitive tracks.

After a mile he came to the old granary where he had found the money, only to lose it to an unseen assailant. He followed on along the final line of the man's retreat. He came to where the man had stumbled. Face down, with bare hands outstretched, the felon had sprawled amidst the leaves of a creeping vine. He saw the imprints of the man's outflung hands. He saw the impression of his chin. The leaves of the vine were reddish, oak-shaped, oddly pitted.

It was poison ivy.

It meant that by now a rash should be breaking out on the man's hands and face. His skin, if normally vulnerable, would be afflicted by the peculiar virus of this vine. It would be an infection which the fellow could not rub off. The more he rubbed, Eagle thought, the worse the rash would be aggravated.

Once more the forest had offered

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a clew to Tom Eagle. He hurried back to his office and rang for Nell Hope.

To her he dictated a circular of inquiry: "Wanted—a man with poison ivy rash on face and hands."

"Have a printer make a thousand copies of it, Miss Hope. Then send it to the police of every town from coast to coast. Ask each police department to inquire among local hospitals and doctors for a man with a red face; that is, a man who calls or has recently called to be treated for poison ivy."

"But is poison ivy as severe as that, major?"

"It depends on the individual skin. In some cases it's extremely severe and hangs on for weeks. In the case of a fugitive hiding out with loot it might be especially bad. His instinct for secrecy might make him take a chance and ignore the affliction in order to avoid contacting a doctor. While he delayed, scratching it, it could spread in a red welt all over his face."

"Good gracious!" Nell Hope exclaimed. "A thousand copies! It may take me days to get them all printed and mailed, with instructions. But I'll rush it along, major."

CHAPTER XVII.

ROBBERY MOTIVE.

WEEDS grew in the farmyard of Alvin Sawyer. Sawyer did not come back. Day after weary day Deputy Pryde, with the aid of New York police, watched in vain for the return of Gilbert Chardell.

A rumor from Hialeah, Florida, reported Ray Fritchie at a race track there. After a week came another which reported him picked up and released in a raid on a Miami gambling den. The man himself was not found.

In his Kittatinny office, District Attorney Eagle waited hopefully for results from his circular. Police from coast to coast were inquiring among hospitals and doctors. A score of poison ivy cases were reported. In most cases it was some barefoot boy or fisherman who was afflicted. In no case so reported was there any reason for suspicion.

The nomadic son of Alvin Sawyer did not return home. The assumption was that he was out west somewhere tramping around, working intermittently as a mechanic at some garage.

"Bet he hasn't even heard about his sister's death yet," Jarlow guessed. "He'll turn up, one of these days, though. Floyd Sawyer never did come home oftener 'n once a year, and he never did stay long then."

"I can't help taking into account, though," Eagle said, "that Floyd's last known job was with Chardell. Chardell says the boy quit him last January in St. Louis, but we have only his word for it."

Weeks passed, and Eagle was forced to give his attention to other cases. After six weeks he presumed that the poison ivy clew was valueless; for the wanted man should now be cured.

Then, just as it began to appear that the Seebree murder would never be solved, a telegram arrived from the police of Seattle, Washington. The wire read:

EMERGENCY HOSPITAL HERE FAILED TO REPORT TREATING MILD CASE IVY POISONING FIVE WEEKS AGO. HOSPITAL RECORD GIVES PATIENT'S NAME AS ROY CLARK. NO DESCRIPTION AVAILABLE.

Eagle called Seattle on long distance.

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"Did Roy Clark give an address?" he asked the chief of police there.

"He gave a phony address," the police answered. "That's why it may be a lead. Sorry we didn't pick it up sooner."

"What do you mean by a phony address?"

"He gave a hotel address, and we find no Roy Clark has been registered there in months. We've checked over the Roy Clarks in the city directory. They're all clean."

"Who treated this man at the hospital?"

"No one really treated him. He just called there and asked for a poison ivy lotion. The office nurse gave it to him."

"She can't describe him?"

"No. She's handled a hundred patients every day since then. She would not even remember that this one had called except for the record. The record only gives a name, hotel address, a date, and the ailment."

"Thank you," Eagle said.

HE considered the date. He looked up train schedules from New York to Seattle. The date of the hospital call, he noted, was four days after the assault on himself at the granary. That fact was barely less challenging than the fictitious address given by the patient.

"What would you do, Miss Hope," Eagle asked, "if you arrived in Seattle with three hundred thousand in loot and with your face poisoned?"

"I'd change my name," the girl answered promptly. "Next I'd hide the money. Then I'd get something for my face."

"Where would you hide the loot?"

She considered this for a moment, then answered brightly, "In a bank, of course. I mean I'd rent a safety-deposit box and put the money in it. I could leave it there until my face was cured and the crime was cold."

"That," Eagle agreed, "is what I would do myself. Please call Seattle. I want to talk with them again."

To the Seattle chief he said, "Will you please make an inquiry at all your local banks? Ask if a man giving the name of Roy Clark rented a safety box within a day or two of that treatment at the hospital."

"I'll do that very thing," the chief promised.

Next morning a telegram came from Seattle. As a result of it District Attorney Eagle and Deputy Sheriff Pryde took off by air transport for the Pacific Coast. They took with them photographs of every one concerned in the Jersey Elms mystery.

An inspector of police met them at the Seattle airport.

"It's the Puget Sound Trust Company, Mr. Eagle," he announced. "I'll take you right there."

An officer at the trust company called in a clerk. The clerk produced a record which proved that a Roy Clark had rented a box on the morning of the same day a Roy Clark had called at the emergency hospital. It was a large-size box and the rent on it was paid for a year in advance.

"The man carried a big brown paper bundle under his arm. He said it was family heirlooms. I took him down to the vault and left him there. I suppose he put the bundle in the box."

"Has he returned?" Eagle asked.

"We keep a record of all safety vault visits," the clerk said. "Roy Clark's card shows no record of a second visit."

"Was he any of these four men?"

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Eagle showed photographs of Gilbert Chardell, Ray Fritchie, Alvin Sawyer, and Floyd Sawyer.

THE clerk studied them. "It's hard to say, sir; because this fellow's face was swollen and red. And it's been six weeks since he was here. I think he was a tall, well-dressed man. Of the four, this picture looks the most like him."

He put a finger on the photograph of Chardell.

The police inspector slapped Eagle on the back. "Looks like you got it sewed up! Chardell, huh? Got away with three hundred grand, did he?"

"May we have a look into that box?" Eagle asked.

"It'll take the formality of a court order," an officer of the bank said.

While Pryde and the Seattle inspector went to apply for a court order, Eagle called at the emergency hospital.

There he displayed the four photographs to the nurse who had served out poison ivy lotion to a patient.

"Now that I see the pictures" she said, "I remember he was tall and had black hair."

Chardell was the only tall, dark, well-featured man of the four.

"Yes," the nurse said, "I'm pretty sure he's the one."

By noon the next day the court order was ready. The order permitted the box to be opened and inspected, but did not authorize the contents to be taken away.

The bank had its own key for the lower keyhole of the box. Roy Clark's key, of course, was not available. A locksmith was called into service and he took an impression. From this he made a duplicate of the missing key.

The box was then opened. Inside of it were found two hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars.

"Fine! He left it all here but a little pocket money," the Seattle inspector exclaimed. "That breaks your case, doesn't it?"

"It clears up the robbery," Eagle said thoughtfully. "But not the murder of Seebree."

Both Pryde and the inspector looked askance.

"What do you mean?" Pryde objected. "Possession of the loot cinches it on Chardell, doesn't it?"

"The robbery yes, but the murder no," Eagle said. "One of the Howdens might have shot Seebree. In either such a case the motive would not be money, because the entire estate already belonged to Howden."

Pryde stared. The Seattle officer asked bluntly, "So what?"

"Or Alvin Sawyer might have shot Seebree for some other motive than money. Seebree, you remember, was shot just after he had stepped out of the house with two suitcases. If either of the Howdens shot him, they would leave the suitcases right by the body. Or so might Alvin Sawyer."

Eagle, however, was not quite satisfied. As district attorney he would have to prosecute Chardell. The issue now was whether he should prosecute merely on a grand larceny charge or on a charge which, with conviction, would send Chardell to the electric chair.

"Shall I stick around here?" Pryde asked Eagle.

"Yes," Eagle decided. "The court order doesn't permit us to remove the money yet, so we'll leave it right in the box. You take a post in the lobby and wait for Chardell. Arrested with his hands on it, he'll be easier to convict."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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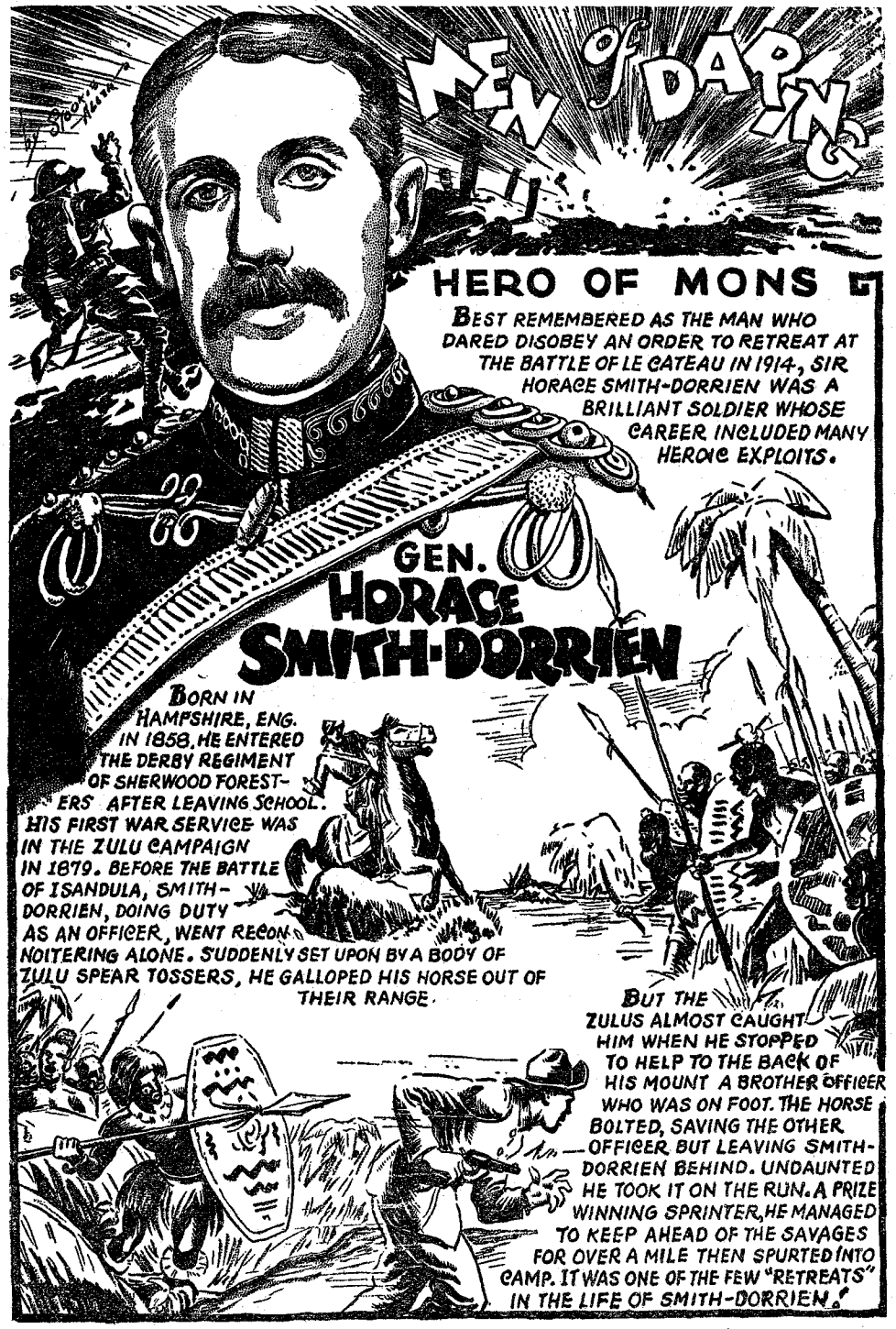
MEN OF DARING
HERO OF MONS
BEST REMEMBERED AS THE MAN WHO DARED DISOBEY AN ORDER TO RETREAT AT THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU IN 1914, SIR HORACE SMITH-DORRIEN WAS A BRILLIANT SOLDIER WHOSE CAREER INCLUDED MANY HEROIC EXPLOITS.
GEN. HORACE SMITH-DORRIEN
BORN IN HAMPSHIRE, ENG. IN 1858, HE ENTERED THE DERBY REGIMENT OF SHERWOOD FORESTERS AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL. HIS FIRST WAR SERVICE WAS IN THE ZULU CAMPAIGN IN 1879. BEFORE THE BATTLE OF ISANDULA, SMITH-DORRIEN, DOING DUTY AS AN OFFICER, WENT RECONNOITERING ALONE. SUDDENLY SET UPON BY A BODY OF ZULU SPEAR TOSSERS, HE GALLOPED HIS HORSE OUT OF THEIR RANGE.
BUT THE ZULUS ALMOST CAUGHT HIM WHEN HE STOPPED TO HELP TO THE BACK OF HIS MOUNT A BROTHER OFFICER WHO WAS ON FOOT. THE HORSE BOLTED, SAVING THE OTHER OFFICER BUT LEAVING SMITH-DORRIEN BEHIND. UNDAUNTED HE TOOK IT ON THE RUN. A PRIZE WINNING SPRINTER, HE MANAGED TO KEEP AHEAD OF THE SAVAGES FOR OVER A MILE THEN SPURTED INTO CAMP. IT WAS ONE OF THE FEW "RETREATS" IN THE LIFE OF SMITH-DORRIEN.

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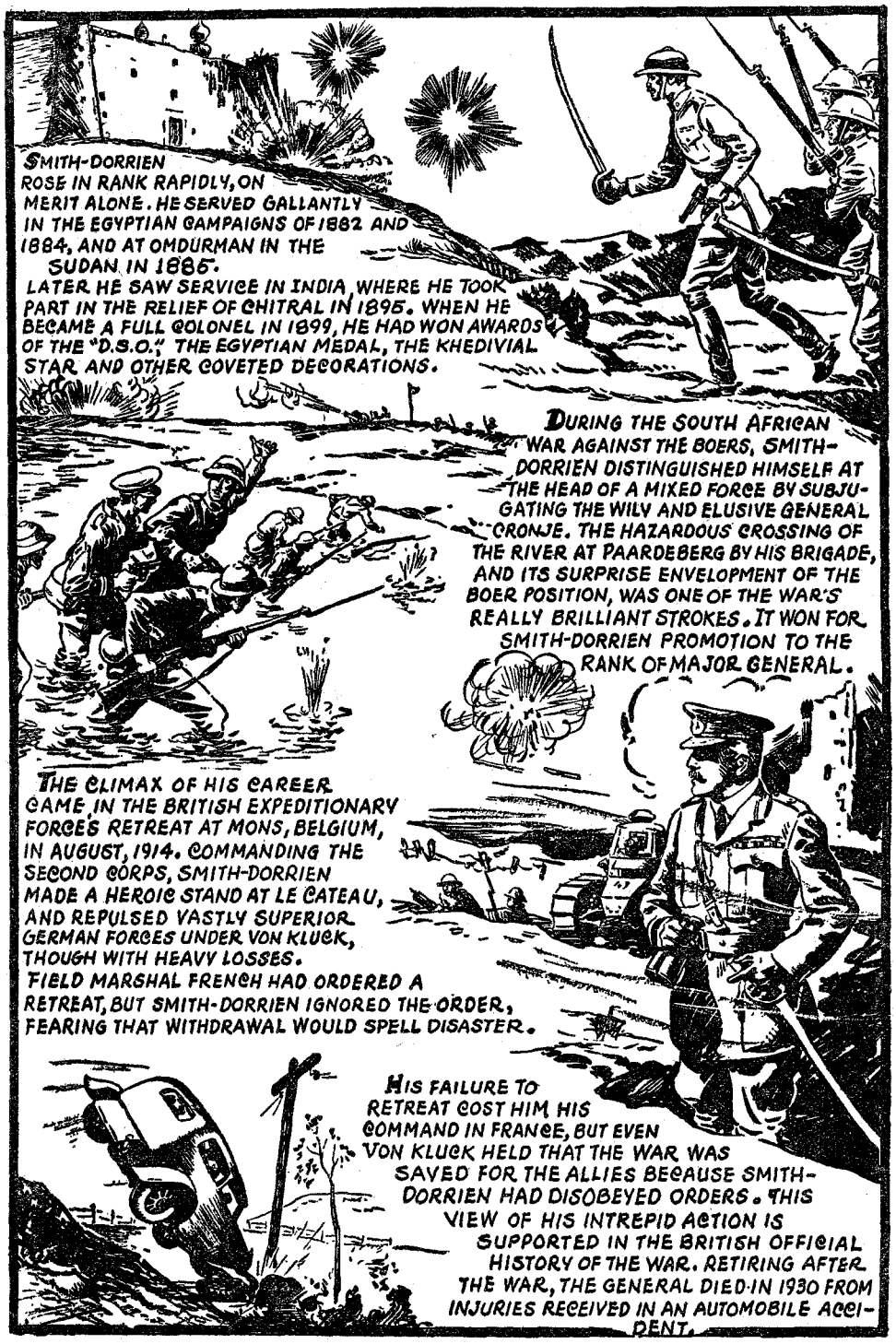
SMITH-DORRIEN ROSE IN RANK RAPIDLY, ON MERIT ALONE. HE SERVED GALLANTLY IN THE EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGNS OF 1882 AND 1884, AND AT OMDURMAN IN THE SUDAN IN 1885.
LATER HE SAW SERVICE IN INDIA, WHERE HE TOOK PART IN THE RELIEF OF CHITRAL IN 1895. WHEN HE BECAME A FULL COLONEL IN 1899, HE HAD WON AWARDS OF THE "D.S.O." THE EGYPTIAN MEDAL, THE KHEDIVIAL STAR AND OTHER COVETED DECORATIONS.
DURING THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR AGAINST THE BOERS, SMITH-DORRIEN DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF AT THE HEAD OF A MIXED FORCE BY SUBJUGATING THE WILY AND ELUSIVE GENERAL CRONJE. THE HAZARDOUS CROSSING OF THE RIVER AT PAARDEBERG BY HIS BRIGADE, AND ITS SURPRISE ENVELOPMENT OF THE BOER POSITION, WAS ONE OF THE WAR'S REALLY BRILLIANT STROKES. IT WON FOR SMITH-DORRIEN PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF MAJOR GENERAL.
THE CLIMAX OF HIS CAREER CAME IN THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCES RETREAT AT MONS, BELGIUM, IN AUGUST, 1914. COMMANDING THE SECOND CORPS, SMITH-DORRIEN MADE A HEROIC STAND AT LE CATEAU, AND REPULSED VASTLY SUPERIOR GERMAN FORCES UNDER VON KLUCK, THOUGH WITH HEAVY LOSSES.
FIELD MARSHAL FRENCH HAD ORDERED A RETREAT, BUT SMITH-DORRIEN IGNORED THE ORDER, FEARING THAT WITHDRAWAL WOULD SPELL DISASTER.
HIS FAILURE TO RETREAT COST HIM HIS COMMAND IN FRANCE, BUT EVEN VON KLUCK HELD THAT THE WAR WAS SAVED FOR THE ALLIES BECAUSE SMITH-DORRIEN HAD DISOBEYED ORDERS. THIS VIEW OF HIS INTREPID ACTION IS SUPPORTED IN THE BRITISH OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE WAR. RETIRING AFTER THE WAR, THE GENERAL DIED IN 1930 FROM INJURIES RECEIVED IN AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT.

Next Week: Lieut. Amos Anderson, the Lone Wolf

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Smooth saw that he was trapped

Midnight Taxi

By BORDEN CHASE

Federal Operative Smooth Kyle had broken part of a narcotic gang—which meant that Smooth's life was worth about five cents

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PETER KYLE, known to his friends as Smooth, found his old trade of cab driving a decided asset when he became a Federal Operative on the trail of a New York dope ring. Smooth began rolling a hack again, and one of his best customers was Bet-a-Grand Rudd, gambler and aspirant to the dope-peddling throne occupied by Big Spanish.

Smooth, enjoying Rudd's confidence, became one of his trusted lieutenants, and Rudd never suspected that Smooth was the one responsible for the warfare that started between the Spanish and Rudd gangs. Meanwhile, Smooth had become quite fond of Dorothy Manning, an actress who joined the Federals to help in the war on dope.

Making Big Spanish's acquaintance, Smooth got an assignment from Spanish to go to Los Angeles and act as one of the links in the smuggling chain. He was accompanied by Gilda Garland.

CHAPTER XVI *(Continued)*.

THE CACHE.

THERE was a cursory examination by the United States Customs inspectors when they crossed the line, and Smooth headed along the waterfront that led up the coast.

"Now what?" asked Gilda.

"Los Angeles—in a hurry. I'm going to park you in a hotel for a while and we'll grab a plane back to New York tomorrow."

"Isn't that too, too divine?" said Gilda sarcastically. "I arrive in California with two suitcases full of clothes and a yen to see the Golden West. Two days later I'm on

This story began in the Argosy for October 12

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my way to New York minus the clothes and with nothing to show for my trip but two extra freckles on my nose."

"Don't forget the diamond, Beautiful," laughed Smooth. "When Rudd hears what we have to tell him, he'll want to give you the Junker or the Kohinoor, at least. Don't you realize that this puts Spanish out of business?"

"I don't get it. How?"

"Take it easy. You'll find out."

HE swung in from the waterfront at Long Beach and threaded his way through the afternoon traffic of Los Angeles. Gilda said nothing when he stopped at a hotel and helped her from the car. And there was a cynical smile upon her face when he left her seated in the lobby and stepped into the manager's office.

Smooth explained his disheveled appearance to the manager, showed credentials that established his identity as an agent of the Bureau of Narcotics, and asked for a small suite. Within five minutes he and Gilda were escorted to a pleasant apartment on the eighth floor and Smooth put through a long distance call to New York.

"How come?" asked Gilda. "We look like a couple of gypsies, no baggage, you've got half of Mexico smeared on your nose, and we get the best in the house. Are you a magician, Smooth?"

"The manager and I used to play marbles together," he said. "Stop asking questions and I'll let you listen in on an interesting talk." The phone bell rang and he nodded toward the instrument. "That ought to be Rudd."

He lit a cigarette, motioned Gilda to sit beside him and held the receiver away from his ear that she might hear both ends of the conversation.

"Smooth talking—that you Rudd?"

"Yes—what's up?"

"We've got the goods on the delivery system—enough for a dozen pinches. I'm sorry to have to crack down so soon, but we had a little accident that forced our hand."

Gilda smiled and kissed Smooth lightly on the ear. He shook his head and winked, and his lips formed the words, "Shut up!"

"Nice work," said Rudd. "Think you can pass it along to the Feds without getting into trouble?"

"Easy! I'll tell 'em I got moved into the job without knowing what was on the fire—and that's on the level. I'll make a deal. They get the information and I scram. Right with you?"

"Yes. How about this end?"

"They'll take care of that. You sit quiet for a few days until the storm blows over. We're coming back on tomorrow's plane."

"Fine, partner. I'll be seeing you."

There was a click and Smooth grinned at the silent receiver.

"He doesn't waste many words, eh, Gilda?"

"He called you partner—and that's something," she said. "Smooth, if you play your cards right, you'll be in the big money soon. Rudd can make you a millionaire in six months if he wants to. That means yachts, servants, cars—all the things that money can buy. And with a bankroll, you'll be forgetting all about little me."

"It's going to be hard to forget the look on Black's face just before you shot me out of that jam. No, Gilda—I won't forget you—even if this bubble pops in a a way you don't expect."

"I wish I'd known you longer," she said slowly. "At times I think I have you right—then there's a change and I feel thousands of miles away from you. You're different—sort of, oh—mysterious is the only word I can think of. When I expect you to make love to me, you laugh. And when—"

"When you expect me to laugh, I make love, eh?"

"No—damn it! That's just the trouble. You don't!"

"Just playing hard to get," he laughed and pinched her ear. "Make yourself comfortable while I get some of the mud off me. I'm going to make a social call on the cops."

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"Please be careful, Smooth. The California jails are not so good, I've heard. And these cops out here play marbles for keeps—they actually think gangsters belong in jail."

"They're foolish," he said, and headed for the bathroom. "They'll never get rich that way."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAN DIEGO COUP.

IT was after office hours when Smooth entered the building that housed the district office of the Bureau of Narcotics, but Martensen was still seated at his desk. He pointed to a chair near him, pushed aside a pile of papers that had held his attention and leaned back to hear Smooth's report.

He tapped lightly with a pencil tip against the desk top as Smooth quickly sketched out his activities and he smiled his approval when he heard how the hiding place in the motor had been located.

"Where's the car now?" he asked.

"At the hotel garage. The hotel manager detailed two house detectives to watch it."

"I'm sorry Black had to be killed," said Martensen. "That means we've got to move fast. I'll have men cover the border towns immediately. Let's see . . . Douglas, El Paso, Eagle Pass, Laredo and Brownsville . . . a nice set of contacts. It's fairly certain the gang operates the same way at all these points, and there must be cars that collect the supply at each town. Well, we'll take care of that!"

"What about the house in San Diego?" asked Smooth. "How do you want to handle it?"

"I'll send some men there with you. Put the car in the garage and see if the stuff is picked up. Those contact points cover a spread of about fifteen hundred miles along the border, and they may be shipping the stuff along every day or two." He reached for the phone and barked a number, then turned back to Smooth. "Make a list of as many of Spanish's mob as you know of. I'll get a call through to McNeary and have him pick them up. We'll get in touch with the Mexican authorities—they're expecting a call from me—and they'll crack down on the outfit that's working over the line."

"Looks like a busy night," said Smooth, and started to write as Martensen gave low-voiced orders over the wire.

One after another he listed the men he could recall as having been in the employ of Spanish. For a moment he thought of putting Lucky Carmine on the list, but dismissed the idea with a smile. Lucky was close to Spanish, probably a very good friend. But that was all there was to it. Lucky was too busy dragging nickels and dimes from the streets of the Big Town to get mixed up in a deal like this.

Smooth remembered the quick look of displeasure that had come to Theresa's eyes when he had suggested that Lucky go to the coast with him. No, thought Smooth, that girl was too clever to let Lucky jeopardize his freedom for the sake of a few quick dollars. Both she and Lucky were looking forward to the time when they could leave Broadway behind them and buy that farm in the country that seemed to have become an obsession with them.

Smooth made no mention of either Lucky or Theresa, but he made a mental note to visit them at some time in the future and tell them of the trade at which he was working. They'd probably laugh and maybe that antagonistic gleam would leave Theresa's eyes.

"Guess this is all," he said, and passed the list to Martensen. "McNeary will know where to pick them up and when you grab this bunch out here, you'll be able to make the case airtight. These punks will talk—they'll yell their heads off, looking for a light term."

"They better," said Martensen grimly. "Now get out of here. You've given me a job of work that will keep me up all night. You'll find three men at the garage, waiting for you—Tom Graley, Fred Gold and Joe Keit—you may remember them."

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"Sure I do. Worked with them a few years ago and they're a swell gang."

"Graley and Gold will follow the car that picks up that stuff. You and Keit take care of the house servants. Get going!"

SMOOTH borrowed a gun and left the office. He stopped at a phone booth, called Gilda and told her to get a good night's sleep and to expect him in the morning. She asked a few questions, but he convinced her he was not in trouble.

Joe Keit was standing near the car in the garage and shook hands with Smooth with a firmness that set his shoulder jumping. He pointed to Graley and Gold seated in a roadster at the curb and they nodded and winked.

"Let's roll," said Smooth, and swung the car out into the street. "San Diego is a hundred and thirty miles away and we've got to be there when the collector arrives."

"And I hope this is the night," added Keit.

During the trip along the coast Smooth explained the set-up. When they stopped for gas, Keit got into the roadster and relayed the story to Gold and Graley. Then they rolled along the smooth highway leading into San Diego and reached the house near the park shortly before midnight. The roadster stopped a few hundred yards from the house and Keit followed Smooth down the walk while the others waited outside.

"Keep your fingers crossed," said Smooth. "If we're late, Martensen is going to swear we stopped for a drink on the way. And when I get east, McNeary will scalp me."

"What happens first?"

"Anything," laughed Smooth, and rang the bell.

The Jap opened the door, stared fixedly at Smooth and seemed about to close it again when he saw Keit standing beside him.

"Where Missa Black?" he asked.

"Burning," said Smooth, and jabbed his gun in the Jap's stomach. "You wanna burn, too?"

"Hiiii! Me very nice person. No shoot, kindly!"

"Shut up and get inside!" ordered Smooth. He jerked his gun toward the Jap and Keit lifted an automatic from the man's shoulder holster. "Very nice person, eh?"

"You police?" squealed the Jap. "Me know very little. Can say nothing—very sorry."

"Police!" grunted Smooth. "Don't kid yourself. Take him down the cellar and shoot him, Keit."

"Why not?" said Keit quietly, and shrugged. "C'mon, Yellow Boy!"

"You not police?" cackled the Jap. "Oh! That very much different. You tough persons, eh? No shoot—me talk!"

"The wisdom of the Orient," laughed Smooth. "Okay, feller—when does the pickup car arrive?"

"Very quick, now. Maybe two, three minutes. Come every three day."

"Whatta break! How about the cook and the maid—they here?"

"Sleep home—get here early in morning. Me very much alone, yes, sir!"

"Get out and drive that car into the garage," ordered Smooth. "When the other car gets here, tell 'em Black is sick and couldn't get any more for them this trip. Hurry!" He turned to Keit and motioned toward the door. "Keep an eye on him and if those birds get here within five minutes let me know. I'll be in the garage."

He hurried out of the back door and sprinted to the garage. A heavy padlock held the doors closed and he was forced to wait until the Jap drove up with the car. One of the keys opened the lock and while the car was rolled into place, he made a hasty survey of the small building.

"Know where the junk is?" he asked.

"Very sorry—never come in here. Missa Black say, 'Keep outta here or get shoot in belly.' I keep out!"

A SET of steel lockers near a work bench opened to another of the keys on Black's ring. Smooth found a number of uniforms and two pairs of shoes

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in one. Behind the clothing was a fully loaded Tommy gun that he appropriated thankfully. On the floor of the other locker was a square metal box in which Smooth found what he was after. He glanced hurriedly at the cans of narcotics, closed and locked the box and shut the locker door.

"Remember, feller," he said, and prodded the Jap lightly with the Tommy gun. "I'll be watching you from the house. When your visitors arrive, give 'em the keys and tell 'em to take the stuff that's in the box. And this baby is gonna make you *awfully* sorry if you get too smart."

"Me very dumb—most very dumb person."

"Glad to hear it," said Smooth, and crossed the yard to the rear entrance of the house.

He found a window in the kitchen that gave him a perfect view of the interior of the garage and settled down comfortably with the gun across his knees. Less than a quarter hour had passed when he heard the squeal of rubber in the street and two men walked quickly across the yard. Both were dressed in dark clothing and both carried suitcases. When the light from the garage illuminated their features Smooth recognized one as a man wanted in New York for bank robbery.

He noticed the hands of both go to their pockets when they saw the Jap and he heard the house boy quickly explaining Black's absence. There was a low-voiced argument and the sound of metal against concrete. Smooth knew the narcotics were being transferred to the suitcases and that the Jap's story had gone across. When the garage light went out, Smooth slipped the barrel of the Tommy gun across the window sill and waited.

The two men with bags walked quickly along the driveway, but he paid no attention to them. He wanted that Jap but he suddenly realized if the Jap made a break, a burst from the gun would warn the gangsters that something was wrong. He knew Joe Keit was in the alley, watching the men. And Joe would burn them down if things went wrong. But that was not the schedule laid out by Martensen and Smooth knew better than to upset the plans of the chief.

He hurried quietly from the back door and ran to the garage. There was no moon and the yard was a patch of darkness out of which rose the darker walls of the garage. The doors were open and as Smooth reached them a silent form crept past the corner of the building and headed for the adjoining yard.

Smooth was after him in an instant. A thorn hedge surrounded the property, but the Jap seemed to melt through it. Smooth tried to follow through the narrow opening and felt a dozen prickly barbs sink into his legs and arms. He cursed the hedge and the man who had planted it, wrenched free and swung the barrel of the gun at the man ahead of him. He missed, sprinted across the yard after the flying Jap and swung again.

This time the steel of the gun barrel whacked against bone and the Jap went down. The chase had been soundless and Smooth thanked the little brown man for keeping his thoughts to himself in his attempted break. A single shout would have warned the gangsters but it would also have ended the Jap's career in a burst of lead.

SMOOTH lifted him, swung him across his shoulder and carried him into the house. A few moments later Keit joined him and grinned at the unconscious Jap.

"Very nice person got tough, eh?" he said.

"Very nice person wanted to go places," said Smooth. "How about the others? Did you get the car number and a description?"

"Yeah. Shall I pass it along to Martensen in case Gold and Graley lose them?"

"Yes, do that. I'll bet he's got a half dozen men scattered around San Diego waiting to go."

Smooth tied the Jap securely to a chair while Keit put through the call. When he had finished, he went to Gilda's room and

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packed her clothes. He was starting to put his own away when Keit called him and handed him the phone.

"Martensen wants you," he said.

"Hello, chief," said Smooth into the instrument. "What's up?"

"McNeary says your joy ride is over. He wants you back East. Keit will stay there and take care of things—I'll send a man out to help him. You catch the plane tomorrow—I mean *today*—it's morning now."

"Nice guy, McNeary," laughed Smooth. "Never a dull moment when you're working for him. Okay—tell the slavedriver I'm on my way."

He hung up, thumbed his nose at Keit and finished his packing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW YORK AGAIN.

GILDA was having breakfast in her room when Smooth arrived at the Trayton. She looked in surprise at the bell boy who stood behind him with both arms full of suitcases. But she asked no questions and when Smooth tipped the boy and dismissed him, she refilled her coffee cup and handed it to him.

"Here—drink this," she said. "You look like an accident going somewhere to happen. Sit down and rest your frame while I order you some breakfast."

Smooth swallowed the coffee and stretched out on the lounge. Gilda was a peach. She knew just the right things to do and when not to talk. He watched her as she gave the breakfast order over the phone and he realized how much she had done for him on this trip west. There had not been a time when he needed her that she had not come through. He wondered what twisted circumstances had places her in a position where Rudd could call upon her and expect her to do as he asked without question. Was it merely greed—the desire for money and all the things it could buy?

Smooth studied her through half closed lids. Her hair had been hastily brushed and at times a soft curl drifted across her cheek. Even at this hour of the morning her eyes were bright and alive and he noticed that although she had not yet applied her make-up her skin was smooth and clear. He had come to look for and enjoy the faintly mocking smile that accompanied her words—the slight lift of her head when she was pleased at anything he might have said—the pouting lips and twitched nose that meant she was displeased. They had both laughed when he called it "making snoots at him" and she had promised to reserve it for his benefit alone.

When she caught him watching her she crossed the room and seated herself beside him on the lounge. She loosened the knot in his tie, rearranged a pillow behind his head and tweaked his nose.

"Penny for your thoughts," she said.

"They're worth more, but I'll sell out cheap," he answered, and caught both her hands in one of his. "I was wondering how you ever got into the racket—and why you stay. Want to tell me?"

FOR an instant her eyes hardened. She stared at him silently; a long, questioning look full of the wisdom of woman. Then she smiled and laid her cheek against his for a moment, brushing her hair across his eyes.

"Are you really interested, Smooth—or just—just curious?"

"I'd like to know—but save it if you'd rather."

"I want to tell you," she said. "I want you to like me, so I'll give myself the best of it. Even at that I'm hard—hard as hell. I don't trust men, Smooth—any of 'em—even you. So far you're the most regular fellow I've come across, but I'm still waiting for that sock in the chin that always seems to come sooner or later. I won't like you any the less when it arrives—I'll be expecting it and I'll make allowances for the fact that you're only a man."

"This doesn't sound like the Gilda I know," said Smooth.

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"It's the real Gilda. The small town kid that won a beauty contest and was given a part in a Broadway production. What a kicking around I got! The belle of Main Street trying to outsmart Broadway. Have a laugh, Smooth. Inside of a month I went overboard for a cloak and suiter with more money than I had dreamed was in circulation. It was the same old merry-go-round—dinners, diamonds and dancing. Then the well known hokum about a home of my own.

"Sure, I went for it. What kid wouldn't? And it was one hell of a jolt to find there just wasn't going to be any wedding because there was already a Mrs. Cloak and Suiter and a flock of little Cloak and Suiters somewhere in Westchester. In fact, that was the first jolt. The second came when I put up a squawk and found that his best pal was backing the show I was in. And I was out of work. Old stuff, eh?"

"Old to a New York hackman," said Smooth. "But sort of new and raw to that kid from the small town. Sometime let me meet that guy—I could work up an easy hate for him."

"You're a bit late, pal," smiled Gilda. "I found a man to do that little thing for me. His name was Rudd—still is for that matter. He caught me on the rebound when I was frothing at the mouth and howling for evens. He broke the former boy friend, as a favor to me. Then he did a few more favors and like a sap I still thought a 'thank you' covered everything. I learned, though when he needed a good looking blonde to steer a few saps into one of his gambling joints, I was the blonde.

"When he closed his place and started to make book I was still useful, but I will say for Rudd that he always pays off. He grins when I fall for a new number, but he digs up a job for me when the inevitable kick arrives. Some of the jobs are messy—like this one—but a gal has to live."

"I've heard of gals working," said Smooth quietly.

"Don't give me that! Not when they get used to nice clothes and champagne, and have nothing to offer but looks. And don't tell me I'm going to wind up behind the eight ball—I know it!"

THE waiter arrived with Smooth's breakfast and Gilda told him to place the table near the lounge. When he started to open the eggs she tipped him and waved him out of the room. She drew up a chair, poured more coffee and seemed to enjoy playing housewife. Smooth tore into the breakfast with all the enjoyment of a man who had missed his previous meal and said little until Gilda passed him a lit cigarette.

"Want to hear all about the tip-off?" he asked, wisely making no reference to Gilda's story. Smooth also knew when to keep his mouth shut about certain things.

"I was wondering when you would get around to that," she said. "But first, when do we go east?"

"There's a 3.30 plane out of Glendale this afternoon that gets into Newark at 9.45 in the morning. That's us, Beautiful."

She threw a roll at him and swung her suitcases up onto the bed. When she opened the lids and saw the manner in which Smooth had packed them, she started after another roll, but he lifted his hands in protest.

"Nix! It was a scramble," he laughed. "And I'm not so hot at packing, anyway."

"What a mess!" she said, and emptied them on the bed. "I'll repack and you talk. Give me the best parts and tell me the rest on the plane. Then you can catch up with a little sleep while I see what the beauty parlors have to offer in this town."

Smooth had arranged a plausible story to cover his night's activities and he rolled it off with the ease of a hackman telling of a five-dollar call. At times Gilda interrupted him with a pertinent question and Smooth was never quite certain that his yarn was getting across. When he finished, he dropped his butt into a coffee cup, yawned and headed for the adjoining room.

"Quite a night, eh?" he asked.

"Grand!" she said. "This little pleas-

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ure trip has added ten years to my life. The land of sunshine and flowers—nuts! I'll take New York—you don't have to drive halfway across a desert to get shot at there. The boys are more considerate of your feelings—they pick a nice dark alley."

THE afternoon plane swept Smooth and Gilda up into a cloudless sky and winged them across the mountain peaks. Desert and plains fell away behind them as the silver ship droned on across the continent. They banked and circled into Albuquerque and then on to Kansas City; a few moments at Chicago and a light breakfast in the clouds. The air was crisp and cool when they landed at the Newark airport and Gilda stood for a moment on the runway breathing deeply, her face turned toward the morning sun.

"New York in October," she said. "It's the top!"

"You sound as though you'd been with Byrd to the Antartic," laughed Smooth. "Five days ago you were standing here singing 'California Here I Come'—now you're acting like an immigrant."

"I feel as though I'd been gone a year. Look!" she said, and pointed to the tower of the Empire State Building, dim in the distance. "They cheer about their mountains at the coast, but they didn't build 'em. That pile of rocks over there—we *built* that!"

"Yeah! *We!* Ironworkers from Pennsylvania, stone setters from Brooklyn, carpenters from Indiana, painters from Colorado and—oh, hell! We're a great gang of New Yorkers, all right. I hear they located a fellow working on Broadway who'd been born in the Big Town and they shipped him up to the Museum."

"Listen to Mr. Broadway!" she laughed. "Soon as he gets a whiff of home he starts weeping. Now suppose you sling those bags in a cab and tell me where we go from here."

"Home, Beautiful—at least, that's where you're going. Meet me at Rudd's place tonight and collect that stone you earned. I'll give you a build-up that should be worth twenty karats."

"And how about you?"

"Oh, I'll scout around and see what's happening, grab a shave and a meal and see you this evening."

When the taxi swung down the midtown ramp of the West Side viaduct and turned east, Smooth directed the driver to stop at Eighth Avenue and Fiftieth Street. He lifted his bags from the cab, turned and held his hand out to Gilda.

"I'll be seein' you."

"Don't be so distant," she answered. She caught his hand and drew him toward her, tilted his chin and kissed him. "After all, the plane tickets read—Mr. & Mrs. Kyle."

"I wonder if Spanish realized what an expensive trip that was going to be?"

"When the word gets out that you framed him, it's liable to be expensive for you, too," she warned.

He closed the door and watched as the cab swept out into the crosstown traffic. He crossed the avenue, stepped into a taxi parked at the corner and told the driver to go north. At a drug store he called McNeary, told him he would see him later in the day and then went on to his hotel.

A FEW hours' sleep and the luxury of a shower and shave helped to dispel the accumulated weariness of the past few days. When Smooth rapped at the door of McNeary's suite he looked little the worse for wear and was even able to accept the Chief's hardy handshake without wincing.

"Come in and sit down," said McNeary. "Make yourself comfortable because you're goin' to get hell."

"I expected that, but will it wait until I ask a question?"

"Oh, she's all right! I told her you were going to be here this evening and I expect to see her any minute. She's a good girl. Smooth—has the makings of a fine operator. Thanks to her I think we'll get enough on Rudd to send him away for a long stretch."

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"That's swell! Now I feel better and I'm ready for that bawling out. What's wrong?"

Smooth seated himself, hooked the toe of his shoe beneath the seat of a near-by chair and drew it towards him. He folded his legs across it, lit a cigarette and faced the Chief. McNeary was pacing nervously about the room, both hands deep in his hip pockets and his lower lip clenched tightly between his teeth. It seemed to Smooth that the Chief had aged years in the past few days. His eyes were deep in their sockets, bloodshot and restless. His movements were quick and irritable. And when he spoke there was a rasp in his voice.

"Martensen has done some splendid work along the border," he said. "I was talking to him this morning on the phone and he seems to have clicked all along the line. El Paso was the main drop.* They trailed that car out of San Diego and picked the men up at a hotel in El Paso. The mob was using the same racket all across the border—dummy cylinders—and they grabbed five cars. Martensen tells me they've got twenty-five men and six women and he thinks they've cleaned up that part of the ring."

"Great!" said Smooth. "Where's the kick?"

"There is none so far as the west coast divisions are concerned. But you certainly put us in a tough spot here in the East. I wasn't quite ready to crack down on Big Spanish, but I *had* to take him. That list you forwarded through Martensen helped and I had a few names to add to it. But you may remember that Big Spanish had been watching me. As a matter of fact, the day you reported for work here in New York, Vince Cartwright was keeping an eye on me. Still it was difficult and slow work dodging them. I was building a nice case. But I wasn't quite ready, and when the break came I think we missed a few."

"And that means," added Smooth, "that New York isn't going to be a healthy spot for me. Spanish will pass the word along that I crossed him and the boys'll be wearing out plenty of shoe leather looking for little Smooth."

"I know it," snapped McNeary. "Your chances in this town are about a hundred to one and I intend to detail two men to work with you until this case is cleaned up."

"Nursemaids, eh?" grinned Smooth. "Nothing doin'!"

The phone rang and McNeary jerked the receiver from the hook.

"Yes?" he barked. "Oh! Come up, I'm expecting you."

HE turned to Smooth and nodded. And it seemed that some of the tension was gone from his voice when he spoke again.

"Guess we'll have to postpone that bawling out. That was Dorothy."

"Lord love her!" laughed Smooth. "Always getting me out of a jam. But before she gets here, suppose I tell you why we had to move so quickly."

"Martensen said there was a killing, but he had so many other things to tell me I couldn't get all the details. What happened?"

"A fellow by the name of Black was fronting as the chauffeur in San Diego. He was a tough customer—a killer. He happened to catch up with me when I was looking for the junk and would have spread me all over Mexico if Gilda hadn't—"

There was a light tap on the door and Smooth left his story unfinished. He crossed the room, opened the door and stood silently admiring the girl in the hall. Dorothy extended both hands, took his and held them, and her eyes seemed to catch fire as she looked at him.

"Smooth! You old fraud! You've had us worried to death. What on earth were you doing at the coast?"

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*A drop is a central point where supplies of illicit liquor or narcotics are deposited for trans-shipment.

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"He's about half finished telling me," said McNeary. "Sit down, Dorothy, and listen to the rest of it." He turned to Smooth and nodded. "All right—what happened when Black held a gun on you in Mexico?"

"That'll keep, Chief," said Smooth uneasily. "Give me a chance to say hello to our new agent. Let's see—beautiful eyes, soft brown hair, lovely teeth—"

"Save that until later," said McNeary. "I want to hear about this trip."

"Yes, Smooth," added Dorothy. "Did Gilda vamp you?"

"Gilda is a grand kid," said Smooth seriously. "When Black had me dead to rights she cracked down on him and rang the bell. She's a regular all the way and if it hadn't been for her I'd never have put it across out there."

"Don't get romantic, Smooth," warned McNeary. "Gilda Garland is one of Rudd's mob. She may have helped you out of a tough spot when she thought you were working for him, but if she knew you were a Fed she'd turn that gun on you just as quickly."

"I doubt it, Chief. Gilda isn't that sort."

"Of course not," said Dorothy. "Nobody understands her—is that it, Smooth?"

"Oh, all right! She's a crook and a killer and she runs with a mob—*but*, I'd be a number in a Mexican cemetery if she wasn't handy with a gun."

McNeary winked knowingly to Dorothy and it seemed to Smooth that her answering smile was slightly forced. He was human enough to enjoy this slight touch of jealousy and to be greatly flattered by it. He realized that McNeary had been wise in forcing the issue by making him tell the story before Dorothy. The Chief had just one concern and that was a smooth working organization. Half truths and mysteries were sure to cause friction and McNeary meant to keep his division in good shape.

"So Black's death forced your hand, eh?" said McNeary. "Well, I suppose it couldn't be helped, but it left us with a few loose ends. We've rounded up most of the distributors, but I know we haven't located the brains of the outfit. These men we've picked up are the usual mobsters—just run of the mill stuff. The real head of the organization is still laughing at us."

"How do you figure that?" asked Smooth.

"Easily! When we grabbed Big Spanish and started an investigation of his holdings we found they were all operated by corporations with dummy members. We traced down the officers and found them to be clerks and minor employees in each enterprise. We knew Spanish was backing the show that Dorothy works in, but when he was picked up we couldn't prove it."

"In other words, we only got the small timers," said Smooth. "But we did break up the distributing system and they have no source of supply. That helps a little."

McNEARY shook his head in disgust and kicked fretfully a table leg. He walked to a window and stared thoughtfully at the street below. Smooth grinned at Dorothy like a school boy who has been reprimanded by the teacher and she stuck her tongue out at him by way of reply.

Without realizing it, Smooth found himself comparing her to Gilda. Both had a delightful sense of humor but there was no suggestion of that worldly hardness about Dorothy that characterized Gilda. Although Dorothy had been in show business for years, she had not acquired the cold veneer that Broadway usually spreads about its people. There was a certain naïvete—a pleasing simplicity that set her apart from other girls Smooth had known, and it puzzled him.

By a peculiar quirk in the scheme of things, both girls had killed a man to save Smooth's life. It had shocked Dorothy—left her with a memory that would trouble her for years. To Gilda, it had been part of the day's work, part of the job she was being paid to do. Smooth remembered her words at the time—"Turn him over—he

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may need another!" It made him stiffen a trifle to recall them. Yes, Gilda was hard—hard and cold as ice.

McNeary broke him from his reverie with a sharp-voiced question.

"When do you see Rudd?"

"Later this evening," Smooth answered. "Any particular line you want me to follow?"

"Yes. Use him to locate the rest of Spanish's mob. It's a cinch that Big Spanish will blame this pinch on Rudd. And if the brains of the Spanish outfit are still running loose, it's only a question of time before they crack down. Rudd must realize that and he'll want to mop up—clean out the whole gang." McNeary laughed, a nervous, strained laugh that told of sleepless nights. "We'll be glad to coöperate with him!"

"What has Rudd told you, Dorothy?" asked Smooth.

"I think he likes me—more than he would want you to know. Of course he's been the perfect gentleman, but, oh!—I don't know how to explain it—it's just something a woman senses."

"I'll be damned!" said Smooth. "I hadn't expected that."

"Why not?" barked McNeary. "It's the oldest racket in the world. Rudd's a shrewd operator. He knows the human equation—he's probably used it all through his gambling career. He dangled Gilda before your eyes, knowing that no matter how smart a man may be he's always stupid enough to say the wrong things to an interesting woman. It's a twenty to one shot that right at this minute she's telling him all the little confidences you passed along to her. For instance—how you asked her what started her in the racket, and suggested that she quit and be a good little girl." He stopped his pacing and stood squarely before Smooth, staring down at him. "Do I call the turn?"

SMOOTH grinned rather foolishly. All the many things he had heard of McNeary's shrewdness came back to him. This man had an uncanny way of knowing the workings of other people's minds. He was known as a soulless machine—a man-hunter. His life was a series of battles against narcotic rings and in these fights, he used every trick at the command of his well trained mind. In dealing with criminals he was as pitiless and mechanical as a microscope. He considered it his duty to exterminate them and he did it.

He considered his agents as parts of a machine. He had no sympathy with a man who allowed his personal feelings to weaken the structure of that machine. And more than one agent had been curtly dismissed from the service for allowing, as McNeary put it—"his heart to interfere with his mind."

"I don't think I've made any mistakes," said Smooth at length. "Gilda thinks I'm up to my neck in the racket."

"Let her keep on thinking that way," snapped McNeary. He turned to Dorothy and laid his hand upon her shoulder. "As for you—*be a woman!* Be smart! Rudd is an old hand at this game. He'll play up to you, and because he thinks you're interested in Smooth, he'll play Gilda against you. Even though he trusts both of you, it will be to his advantage to break up this combination. The result would be that he'll have both of you watching the other and reporting to him."

"I think I can take care of my part of the job," said Dorothy, and she turned her eyes slowly toward Smooth. "And I don't think you have to worry about my partner. I only caught a glimpse of Gilda at the theater, but she seems old enough to be a mother to him."

"Meeow!" said Smooth.

"That'll be all of that!" barked McNeary. "Dorothy—tell Smooth what Rudd has been saying."

"He took me to Joe Silva's place the other night. It's a magnificent penthouse on Central Park West and I've never seen such an elaborate gambling layout before in my life. Rudd has a piece of it and now they're using it as a distribution center for narcotics. Only the wealthy trade, naturally."

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"Nice work," said Smooth. "But have you any idea how he gets his supplies?"

"No—none at all. But I understand he's using quite a few of his men to break in on Spanish's old territory. You know the ones I mean—the men who used to work with him taking bets on the horses. Tout Ender handles them and keeps them supplied."

"Have you met anybody by the name of Yitz Cohen or Hoegy Bright?"

"No. Rudd talked to Cohen last night over the phone—said something about a full moon, but I couldn't get much of it."

"*He did?*" shouted Smooth, and jumped to his feet. "That's all I want to know. It checks with what I've been thinking." He turned to McNeary and grinned. "I know where I'm heading now, Chief. We'll wrap Rudd up in a hurry."

"Yeah," said McNeary, and for the first time there was a trace of a smile on his face. "I get it. They're working the old gag again. All right, Smooth—it's up to you."

Smooth nodded and walked to the door. He paused for a moment to grasp Dorothy by the elbow and shake it lightly.

"Will I see you at Rudd's place after the show?" he asked.

"Yes, about midnight."

"Great! Tell Rudd we had lunch together—he'll expect it. And—look out for the big bad gambler."

"Get out, you clown!" she laughed and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO WOMEN.

IT was after ten o'clock when Smooth was admitted to Rudd's apartment by Simpson, the butler. He found the gambler seated behind his desk in the library and with him was Yitz Cohen. Both men grinned when Smooth entered and Cohen crossed the room to shake his hand.

"Nice work, feller!" he said. "Whatta cleanup you started! They're gonna have to build new jails to hold all the customers when the Feds get finished with Big Spanish's mob. Pretty goin'!"

"Yes, Smooth," added Rudd. "It was the smoothest piece of work I've seen in a long while. But then—Smooth is the name, eh?"

"Toss the bouquets to Gilda," said Smooth. "She's a wonder. The way she took Jordan over the hurdles was a work of art. All I had to do was sit back and coast along. Then when the break came, I tipped the Feds. Yeah, it was fast, but don't forget, Rudd, when we play with the Treasury Department, we're playing with dynamite."

"I've been thinking of that," said Rudd. "They may keep an eye on you for a while. Want to scram out of the country for a rest? You sure earned one."

Smooth walked to the window and stared off into space as though in thought. He had spoken about the Federals because a man with the shrewdness that Rudd possessed would certainly have thought of that angle. It was only natural to suppose the Federal agents would watch a man who had been working for Big Spanish, even though he had tipped them off to a fine catch.

Smooth tried to clear his mind of the idea that he was working for the Bureau of Narcotics. How would he act if he were in reality a gangster in the employ of Rudd? Would he take that vacation? No—that wasn't the answer. The Feds wouldn't be fooled by the temporary disappearance. In fact, they'd immediately start a search for him, thinking that some member of Spanish's mob had acted in reprisal.

"That won't do," he said aloud. "They'd wonder where I was gettin' the dough to pay expenses. The smart move for me is to go back on a hack. It'll be a swell front and I might come in handy for you."

"Good headwork," agreed Rudd. "Better watch your step for a while, though. The Feds missed out on some of Spanish's men and you're plenty hot with those boys."

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Smooth had been waiting for this. He tried to make his next question casual. He had to! Here was the information that McNeary was waiting for.

"Who'd they miss?"

"I wish I knew," snapped Rudd.

"Yeah, so do I!" barked Cohen. "They got two of my boys last night out in Brooklyn. Good men, too! Walked 'em up an alley and gave 'em the works."

SMOOTH left the window and swung one leg across the corner of Rudd's desk. He watched the gambler's slim white hands tapping out their ceaseless tattoo on the polished wood. If this man had been unable to spot the head of the Spanish mob, what chance had he? Rudd's parchment-like fingers were constantly on the pulse of the underworld. They extended in every direction through the maze of streets and alleys that was New York. The hop-heads who were now dependent upon him for their supply of narcotics would be only too eager to pass along any information they might have. It seemed incredible that a group could operate in this city unknown to him. But Smooth knew that Rudd was puzzled, and suspicious. There had appeared to be a trace of fear in his voice when he said, "I wish I knew." And Cohen was worried, too.

"Well," said Smooth, "it looks as though I'll need a rabbit's foot under the driver's seat of my hack. But what else can I do?"

"I've got one other spot for you," said Rudd slowly. "It's not a soft job, but it would keep you from getting a slug in your chest. And the Feds would never find you, either."

"Where's that?"

"Working with Hoegy Bright on the boats. You could ride the Roulette—she's a nice little cruiser that operates along the coast. South America, Mexico and New York—well, not exactly New York, but she stops off the Jersey coast. Get it?"

Smooth grinned and nodded. He had been right in his guess and when Dorothy had told him of Rudd's telephone conversation about the moonlight she had prepared him for this. Rudd was using the same tactics that the booze rings had employed during Prohibition. In fact, there was still a fleet of liquor carriers operating off the Jersey coast and sending in untaxed liquor.

"Sounds like old times," said Smooth. "I worked the boats for Vannie Higgins years ago and it was no picnic. If that's the way you're bringing in the stuff, it didn't take you long to get organized."

"It never does when you've got money to spend," said Rudd. "The Roulette brings a shipment up from the south and contacts me by radio. Hoegy Bright runs the small boats for me and I've got two beauties. They can chase circles around anything the Feds have in the water. Like to join him?"

"No, thanks!" smiled Smooth. "One cruise with the off-shore fleet was enough for me. I'll take a chance on the hack. If you want me to contact the shore boats, I'll do that—but nix on the winter sailing, it's hard on the ears."

Both Rudd and Cohen grinned broadly. It was obvious that Hoegy Bright had done his share of complaining and when Smooth proved he was an old timer, they raised him another peg in their estimations. The Jersey coast was a tough spot in the fall and winter months. The boats put out in heavy fogs and driving storms. Clear, moonlit nights were shunned by these blockade runners as too dangerous, and the worse the weather the better for their trade. It was a cold, wet, miserable business with all the chances against the men. The Federals had a nasty way of shooting first and then asking questions and more than one group of rum-runners had been chalked up as missing when their bullet-riddled boat had drifted ashore.

RUDD finally agreed that Smooth would fit into the outfit as a taxi driver, but again warned him of the chances of stopping a bullet. They talked for the better part of an hour and Smooth gave them the highlights of his trip to the coast. He noticed that Rudd's eyes were

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studying him closely when told of Gilda's part in the venture and he wondered what thoughts were taking shape behind those bright, jet-like beads.

The conversation broke off sharply when Simpson announced Gilda. Yitz Cohen patted Smooth lightly on the shoulder and said that he must run along. He tossed a light salute to Rudd, smiled to Gilda and left after promising to meet Smooth the following night.

Rudd did not leave his place behind the desk, but watched silently as Gilda crossed the room and stood beside Smooth. There was a slight lift to his upper lip when she caught Smooth lightly by the chin, tilted it and kissed him.

"Careful, Gilda," Rudd warned mockingly. "I'm expecting Miss Manning along in a few minutes. She might not enjoy that."

"Really?" said Gilda lightly. "I had no idea she was interested." She leaned against Smooth's shoulder and smiled at him. "You seem to be quite a man with the ladies, Handsome."

"Be nice, Gilda," said Smooth. "Park yourself in a chair and give me a break. If you behave, I'll tell Rudd what a swell job you did at the coast. It ought to add a few more karats to that stone he promised you."

"Oh, yes," said Rudd, and lifed a flat leather box from a desk drawer. He opened the lid and withdrew a folded tissue paper that he spread before him. A dozen beautiful stones were grouped in the center, each sending out a flashing brilliance. "Take your pick, Gilda—you've earned it. As for you, Smooth"—he tossed a package of bills across the desk—"here's your cut. Satisfied?"

"Plenty," said Smooth, and watched Gilda.

She was bending above the stones, touching them lightly with a forefinger, spreading them and judging of their worth. Smooth saw her at her worst, then. The diamonds seemed to have touched a spark that grew to a flame of avarice. Her eyes were wide and cold—cold as the gems that sent frosty sparkles about her fingers. Her lips were thin and hard against her teeth, and above the crackle of the paper Smooth heard the quick throb of her breath.

Rudd reached again into the drawer and brought out a small round glass with a curved eyepiece fitted to it. He set it beside the stones.

"They're all blue-white and perfect, Gilda," he said. "Try them under the loop—don't trust me."

"I never did trust you, my dear," snapped Gilda, and adjusted the loop to her eye. "There was no flaw in the job we did for you, and I don't want one in the payment. Here"—she moved one stone aside with her finger—"this is the best. Thank you, darling."

She tore off a strip of the tissue, wrapped the diamond and dropped it into her purse. She turned and looked at Smooth and smiled cynically at the expression in his eyes.

"Thinking of Black spread out on the road in Mexico, Handsome?" she asked lightly. "Well, so am I—and I'll take my pound of flesh, thank you!"

"Maybe I am," said Smooth. "Maybe I'm thinking it might have been me. Thanks, Beautiful."

HE folded the money, put it in his pocket and poured drinks for both Gilda and himself from the decanter. Rudd replaced the stones in their leather case, set them back in the drawer and closed it. He nodded slightly when Simpson appeared in the doorway and leaned back in his chair as though to enjoy a tight situation.

"Hello, everybody," said a voice from the doorway

Smooth turned quickly to see Dorothy crossing the room. She smiled to Rudd and hooked a possessive arm through one of Smooth's. Gilda had seated herself in a comfortable chair near the bookcase and Smooth saw her eyes travel swiftly from Dorothy's maroon felt hat, down past her velour coat of the same color—saw them pause in grudging approval at gray kit-fox

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trimmings and again at Dorothy's small suède shoes. It was a single sweeping glance that missed not the slightest detail and when he turned to introduce Dorothy he noticed that she was silently cataloguing Gilda's ensemble.

He drew a deep breath, crossed his fingers for luck and wondered why women had to complicate an assignment that was plenty tough without them.

"Gilda," he said, "I want you to know Dorothy Manning—she's a grand girl." He turned and smiled at Dorothy. "I've told you about Gilda Garland—she's the girl who flew to the coast with me."

Dorothy favored Gilda with a stare that Smooth knew was the same she used in the third act when she was supposed to discover a hair in her soup. Gilda saw the raise and bet an extra blue chip by rising from her chair and holding out both hands to Dorothy.

"Hello, darling," she cooed. "I hope Smooth didn't tell you *all* about our trip."

"Only the high spots," said Dorothy evenly. "And they took up most of the afternoon. He's probably saving the rest for our honeymoon. He's adorable in his weaker moments, isn't he?"

"Hey! Stop taking me apart," said Smooth quickly, and swung to face Rudd. "Let's get out of here while I'm in one piece—we'll hit a few night clubs or something."

"Why not?" said Rudd evenly. "We'll stop in at Silva's place and try the tables. Although, if I were you, Smooth—I wouldn't risk too much money. Lucky at love, you know—"

CHAPTER XX.

HIGH LIFE.

SMOOTH was the first to step out of the cab when it pulled up before the marquee of the apartment on Central Park West that housed Big Joe Silva's gambling establishment. Mullans, the doorman, was standing stiffly at attention, waiting to help Dorothy and Gilda. He started slightly when he caught sight of Smooth paying off the driver, but covered his astonishment by a murmured, "'Evening, Mr. Rudd," to the gambler. Rudd smiled and offered an arm to each of the girls, escorted them to the doorway and stood waiting. Smooth nudged a friendly elbow against Mullans' ribs and winked at him.

"How's tricks, Mullans?" he asked.

"Fine. Mr. Kyle—fine!"

"Mister your eye! I'll be back on a hack tomorrow night and you'll be callin' me Smooth again."

"Sure, you travel too fast for me," said Mullans. "I've missed you the last few evenings and I was askin' Lucky about ya."

"Yeah? Is he around tonight?"

"There he is, down at the corner—see him?"

Smooth glanced along the building fronts and saw a group of drivers standing near the first cab. A little to one side and leaning against the front fender of the taxi was Lucky Carmine. He lifted a hand above his head and made a gesture that meant "High Hat."

"Lucky thinks I'm putting on the ritz," Smooth said to Mullans. "He's trying to tell me I've gone high hat. Tell him if he's around in a few hours I'll give him a good call."

He hurried to join Rudd and the girls, and noticed that Gilda had stepped back on the sidewalk and was staring at Lucky. She said nothing until they were in the elevator on the way up to the penthouse, although Smooth caught her looking at him in surprise.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Wasn't that the little fellow we met at Spanish's place?" she said quietly.

"Sure. What of it?"

"Plenty, if he runs with that mob."

The elevator drew to a stop and they stepped out of the car into a small hallway that topped the shaft. A huge pair of bronze doors opened onto a short flight of stairs that led down to a garden. Tiled walks curved in graceful patterns about

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clumps of shrubbery and to one side a miniature waterfall splashed and rippled over a series of rock terraces in which were concealed dozens of vari-colored lights. It was as though some dream-like forest glade had been transplanted to the roof of this New York apartment. The crisp breeze of the October night rustled the branches of the evergreens and set them to whispering, and through them could be seen the lights of the penthouse set far back on the roof.

"What's the trouble, Gilda?" asked Rudd. "See somebody you don't like?"

"Oh, Gilda's got the fidgets," said Smooth. "One of the hackmen on the corner has a girl friend who works in the Trocado—Spanish's joint. We met him there and Gilda is afraid he may be looking for me with a hunk of lead."

"She might be right. If he's one of Spanish's men, I'll send a few boys down to get rid of him. What's his name?"

"Oh, Lucky's all right. It'd be a shame to bump him off just because he happened to know Spanish. He's a nice little fellow and he's not mixed up with that mob." Smooth turned to Gilda as though for confirmation of his words. "Don't you remember how Theresa acted up when I offered to take Lucky to the coast with us? Why, she almost had a fit—even wants him to quit the hack racket and become a farmer. No—I'm not worried about Lucky."

"Suit yourself," said Rudd.

BIG JOE SILVA was at the door of the penthouse to welcome them. Rudd introduced Smooth and said, "He's just in from the coast." Silva nodded wisely and Smooth noticed that he was sizing him up. Silva was immaculate in evening clothes that fitted him to perfection. Tall, rather thin, with black hair that was graying at the temples—he was a picture of the debonair New Yorker, catering to the cream of Manhattan's spenders.

"Did you bring your luck with you?" he asked. "If you did it's apt to be a bad night for the house."

Smooth smiled but said nothing. He followed Rudd and the girls through a large foyer and into a spacious room that was already well crowded. A hardwood bar curved in a semicircle across the length of one wall. Three white-coated attendants were busy mixing drinks and serving scattered groups of men and women seated at tall stools before the bar.

Ice jingled crisply in the shakers, women laughed and a hum of conversation filled the room, while through it sounded the sharp click of falling chips and the whir of balls spun against the rim of the roulette wheels by croupiers. Horseshoe shaped tables, elbow-high and covered with green felt, were set in a line against another wall. Behind each a soft voiced dealer flipped an endless stream of cards to the black-jack players. Long oval tables with banked sides occupied prominent positions in the center of the floor and about them grave-faced men and laughing women watched the white dice win or lose for them.

Rudd handed each of the girls a stack of gold chips that he had purchased from one of the dealers and led them to stools at a roulette table.

"There you are, kids," he said lightly. "Play anything but your age—that's never a lucky number." He slipped a hand beneath Smooth's arm and led him to the bar "What do you think of the place?" he asked.

"Quite a spread," said Smooth. "Silva's take must run into the thousands every night."

"We don't do half bad. Silva is working with me now and if we don't take the suckers one way, we get them another. Sometimes I wonder where these dumb bunnies get the money that we take away from them—the chumps!"

Smooth ordered a drink and watched the bartender mix it. He realized that Rudd was opening up—taking him into his confidence far more than he had expected. It was unusual for this tight-lipped gambler to tell his employees more than was absolutely necessary. But since the trip to the coast, Rudd had been very communicative. It was obvious he trusted Smooth and in-

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tended he should have a major part in his enterprises.

"I can see that Silva won't have any trouble putting out the junk to the carriage trade in this place," said Smooth. "The word will go around to all the high-hat snow birds* in town and they'll come here for their hop. It should bring plenty of play for the tables, too. But how about the little fellows—the mugs with only a couple of bucks to spend for cut snow? Where do they get it?"

"Tout Ender handles that trade. I want you to meet him tomorrow and bounce around town with him for a while, then I've got another job for you in the evening."

"Sounds as though I'm gonna be a busy guy," said Smooth.

"You are. I like you, Smooth—like the way you work—you're fast and do as you're told without a lot of guff. This racket is big business—damn big, and I need a man like you to help me handle it. You're on the way to some of the biggest money you ever saw in your life. Play ball with me and you'll make a million."

"Why not? I can use a million."

BIG JOE SILVA joined them at the bar. He looked at Rudd and made a slight motion with his head indicating that he wished to speak to him alone.

"You can talk in front of Smooth," said Rudd. "What's on your mind?"

"We just picked up a call from Hoegy Bright. He says he's goin' to send again in ten minutes—a message for you. Want to hear it?"

Rudd nodded, took Smooth by the elbow and followed Silva through a narrow hall that led into a room at the far end of the penthouse. Silva closed the door and locked it. Rudd seated himself at a desk beside which was a new model all-wave radio. He pointed to a chair close by and indicated that Smooth should sit down and say nothing. Silva swung a heavy set of drapes across the windows and stood beside Rudd.

The noise of the gambling room came to them as a faint murmur, deadened by the heavy door and walls. Smooth watched Rudd closely as he made a slight adjustment of the dials and saw him glance at his wrist watch and hold it out to Silva.

"When does he send—on the even hour?" he asked.

"Yeah—ought to be comin' in now."

Rudd turned to Smooth and jerked a finger toward the radio.

"Bright's on the Roulette, about twelve miles off Toms River on the Jersey Coast. When he wants to shoot me a message he sends a few signals so the boys can locate me. He ought to be—listen—"

Smooth heard a rhythmic hum drifting from the loud speaker. The code letters B-G-R were repeated five times and after a pause of three minutes they were again repeated. Smooth smiled to himself when he realized that once more his months of training as a student in the department were proving themselves well spent. He had begrudged the hours of study he had put into learning code. When, he had asked, would an agent be called upon to use Morse, International or any other code?

He was getting his answer now.

Silva and Rudd were leaning forward, listening intently to the stuttering hum. The sender was a speed merchant and he was ripping it out in bursts. And now Smooth saw Rudd grab a pencil and write quickly on a pad. Deliberately Smooth turned a shoulder to the desk as though not wanting to see the message.

"C IN JAM." The sender repeated this as though for emphasis. "NOT FS MAYBE HJS N REPORTS C DOWN AM SHIFTING TO MP."

There was a long hum and once more the message came through. But Rudd was not listening. He had thrown the pencil petulantly to the floor and his fingers were twisting and interlocking above the pad. Silva was cursing low voiced and steadily

* Carriage trade means wealthy customers. Snow birds are narcotic addicts.

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and he stared at Rudd as though awaiting orders.

"DID you get that, Smooth?" barked Rudd.

"It's Greek to me," lied Smooth. "Dots and dashes don't talk my language."

"Yeah? Well, you're gonna learn 'em. That was Hoegy Bright singin' a swan song." He glanced at the pad. "He says the Cigarette is in a jam. She's a fast little boat I use to contact the Roulette and bring in the junk. I told that mug not to operate tonight—too much moon. But the wise guy thinks he's a jump ahead of me and he sends out the boats. Next, he says it's not Federals but maybe it's hijackers. Nice, eh?"

"Tough," said Smooth. "But she might get away."

"Not a chance! The last part of that message said the Cigarette is down—sunk! The other boat, the Nicotine, reported that. And then Bright says he's shifting his position from the Jersey Coast to Montauk Point. I'll shift him — the fool! For a dime I'd burn him!"

"Aw, anyone can make a mistake," said Silva. "Take it easy."

"Not in this racket, they can't!" said Rudd slowly. "The Cigarette was a fast little number and she was carrying plenty. That mistake sets me back damn near a hundred grand and I don't intend to let Bright make another."

"We ain't got a man to replace him," protested Silva. "Be a good guy, Rudd. Give him a break."

"Oh, all right." Rudd unlocked the door and motioned to Smooth. "You stick around, Joe, and listen for some more headaches. We're goin' to the bar."

Dorothy and Gilda were seated on stools, sipping cocktails, when Rudd and Smooth joined them. There appeared to be an armed truce existing between them and they were laughing at the exaggerated antics of a bartender who was shaking a drink. Gilda looked once at Rudd and lifted her eyebrows in an inquiring gesture to Smooth. He winked and ran a forefinger about the rim of his collar in a manner that meant, "He's hot."

Dorothy had caught the little byplay and was clever enough to let Rudd cool off before she spoke to him. The bartender had set a tall glass of milk on the bar and she slid it before the gambler and smiled.

"You girls had enough of this place?" he asked.

"More than enough," smiled Dorothy. "Gilda's broke and I won two hundred." She slid a pile of chips toward him "Here's the stake you gave me. Thanks for the fun."

"Keep it," he said. "I'm glad somebody's lucky around here tonight."

"I'm not complaining," laughed Gilda. "Every day isn't a holiday—and I had my luck with me in California. Didn't I, Smooth?"

"Let's get out of here," said Smooth. "Cash your chips, Dorothy—it's the end of the night." He turned to Rudd and touched his arm. "Want me to roll a hack tomorrow?"

"Yes. Meet Tout Ender in front of the Cadillac Hotel about four o'clock. I want him to show you around. Then stop in at my place after supper."

"Fair enough—let's scram."

MULLANS saw them coming from the doorway and lifted his hand to signal a cab. There was a moment's wait and Smooth grinned when he saw Lucky Carmine swing in before the marquee. He handed Mullans a bill, winked to Lucky and started to help Dorothy into the cab.

"Smooth, you take Dorothy home, like a good fellow," said Rudd. "I'll grab another cab and drop Gilda off on the way. She lives on the East Side near my place."

"Oh, I get dropped, do I?" laughed Gilda. "Well, a gal can't always be lucky. Goodnight, Dorothy — and you too, Smooth darling."

Smooth stepped into the cab, gave Dorothy's address to Lucky and leaned back

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against the cushions. A high pointed heel came down upon his instep and he jumped. When he turned to face Dorothy she was looking out the window, waving to Rudd.

"Why the kick in the shins?" he asked.

"Oh, did I kick you, Smooth, *darling?*" she mimicked Gilda's voice and the inquiring lift of her eyebrows. Suddenly her manner changed and also her voice. "Why shouldn't I? I've heard nothing but, 'When we were in California—' and 'Smooth said this and Smooth did that, the dear'—and I'm sick of it. Who does that dame think she is?"

"You big baby!" laughed Smooth. "She's kidding you and you sizzle every time she hands you a burn. Grow up, Dorothy."

He caught her hand and held it between both of his. For a moment she stared at him and he saw that her eyes were wet. Then her head was against his shoulder and his arms were around her and she was whispering foolish words against his chest.

When Lucky turned into West End Avenue, Smooth caught his eye in the mirror and nodded toward the Drive. Lucky swung west and rolled across to the waterfront. The meter clicked steadily as they swept north along the bank of the moonlit Hudson but Smooth didn't hear it. When they turned and started downtown again he had told Dorothy for the twentieth time that she was the only girl he had ever loved—that Gilda meant nothing to him—that there never was a blonde who could compare with a brunette—and all the other things a man in love can tell a girl in the back of a taxi.

LUCKY coughed as they neared Eighty-third Street and Dorothy pushed Smooth away and glanced a little shamefacedly at her wrist watch.

"Smooth! It's almost morning," she gasped. "Oh, tell him to take us home."

"I'll never forgive him for that cough," said Smooth. "But you're the boss."

He tapped on the front window and Lucky circled the block and drew up before Dorothy's apartment. Smooth helped her from the cab, walked with her through the dimly lit foyer and stopped near the elevator. The elevator boy was perched on a stool, his head resting against a wall of the car, and he was sleeping soundly. Smooth pointed to him and held a finger to his lips. He asked for another kiss.

Twenty minutes later he whistled his way across the sidewalk, reached in and pulled Lucky's cap over his eyes and cuffed him playfully on the ear.

"What do you think of the future wife?" he asked as he climbed into the back of the cab.

"Grand number," answered Lucky. "Got more class than the blonde, but what does Gilda think?"

"Guess you're wondering what it's all about, eh, Lucky?"

"Me? — say, I never wonder about nothin'. To me it's all a lotta tripe. But, feller, you're sure travelin' high, wide and handsome. If I was you I'd slow down on the corners."

"I guess you got me spotted as one of Rudd's men," said Smooth quietly, "so I'll give you the setup. I took a quick hop to the coast and knocked off Spanish's outfit. But why not? He pulled a squeeze on me when he talked me into the job. If I'd a said no—his mob would've left me in an alley. It was a case of sign up, or else—"

"I ain't holdin' it against you, Smooth. Spanish was nothin' to me—I even coppered my bets when he asked me about you. If you guys want to battle—fight it out amongst ya! Me, I'm in the clear. Theresa would knock hell outta me if I got mixed up with a mob."

"That's what I told Rudd when he asked about you. You're in the clear. But I figure you were close enough to Spanish to know most of his men. Some of them are still on the loose and when they catch up with me—I burn. Any idea who they might be?"

"I wouldn't know," said Lucky quietly. "Where do I drop you off?"

"Old Closemouth, eh?" laughed Smooth. "All right, pal—have it your way. But

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swing east at the corner. Eleventh Avenue is too damn empty for a guy in my trade."

CHAPTER XXI.

TAKEN FOR A RIDE.

LUCKY shrugged and slowed to make a left turn. As the cab wheels thudded over the cobbles, a dark sedan cut in to the left and jerked to a stop, blocking the taxi. Two men leaped from the rear of the car and headed for the cab. One held a Tommy gun slung beneath his right arm and the muzzle never wavered from Smooth's head.

It would have been suicide to go for his gun and Smooth lifted his hands and kept them up. He noticed Lucky sat quietly at the wheel and stared directly ahead. It was none of the little hackman's business what happened in the back of his rig and Smooth knew he did not intend to get mixed up in it.

The man with the Tommy gun opened the cab door and prodded Smooth to the far side of the seat. He jerked up a drop seat, got in and sat facing Smooth. The other man held a low voiced conversation with Lucky and then seated himself beside Smooth and lifted the gun from beneath his armpit.

Smooth saw the driver of the sedan make a quick turn and streak up Eleventh Avenue; Lucky swung the cab and fell into the wheel marks, and Smooth tried to remember a few prayers to pass away the time that was left before the Tommy gun started to stutter. He remembered having seen the man with the gun at the bar in the Trocado and he realized that at last Spanish's mob had caught up with him.

Well—that was the breaks. Sometimes you win and then comes the upset that evens things. He had no complaint. When his luck was in he had forced it and now it seemed to have run out. McNeary would need a new agent and Rudd would get a new lease on life, for a time at least. Dorothy? He didn't want to think about that. He watched the street lights wink pass and decided the man beside him was one of those who worked out of town for Spanish — he looked like it — too damn healthy looking.

Lucky took the curve that led onto Riverside Drive, stepped down harder on the gas and settled in his seat. They were passing Eighty-first Street when Smooth caught sight of another car burning the road behind them. He forced a grin. It was quite an honor to have such elaborate plans laid for his last waltz. A Tommy gun—a car ahead—and now another car behind. Quite a parade!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

How to Make Gold

TAKE a cathode-ray pistol and carefully shoot away three protons, or positive electrons, from an eighty-two electron lead atom. This will convert the tiny atom into a seventy-nine electron atom which is a gold atom! Take another lead atom and repeat this simple operation until you have the desired amount of gold!

The time required and the mighty power you would need to "split" the atoms would make your gold the most expensive metal ever produced.

It would require 400,000,000 of the gold atoms, placed side by side, to measure one inch—and they would be worth seventy-six cents.

—*Joseph W. Skidmore.*

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Stairway to Rose Street

By STEWART ROBERTSON

Her father threatened to snatch the Shiner baldheaded

"The Shiner" lived for a single Big Idea—an idea he intended to back up by a slick seven inches of cold steel

YOU notice it as you are coming off Brooklyn Bridge at the Manhattan end. The bridge itself will be behind you, and as you enter the gloomy, covered approach that slopes to Park Row, the stairway yawns on your right, an informatory board on its rust-flaked iron railings.

> STAIRWAY TO ROSE STREET
> *Open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.*

As a time-saver for the worn, the lazy, and even as in one particular case the light-hearted lover, the stairway fulfills its duty to humanity. This indebtedness is considered over at eight in the evening, when the night cleaner closes the top and bottom gates; for Rose Street is one of those bedraggled thoroughfares on which the respectable have no business after dark. Given birth amid the bulky piers of the bridge, the street careens northeast until it commits suicide two blocks

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away by running smack into a scrofulous brick walk-up on Pearl Street.

Viola lived in that walk-up, and if she hadn't—well, she would have lived somewhere else, and probably she would have been responsible for a story just the same. The Violas of the world are like that.

Walking symphonies of cream and gold and azure are not uncommon in many parts of New York, but at the junction of Rose and Pearl Streets any such apparition was to be marked for future reference.

Chief among the markers was the Shiner.

THERE was another observer, too. When the female symphony plopped a cushion across her windowsill and leaned on it to survey the corner through her cornflower blue and somewhat shallow eyes, it was small wonder that a gay lad like Silvio, tossing parcels from his express wagon, gave her a hail for the sheer joy of it.

Perfectly aware of her power, Viola did not answer the greeting. Nevertheless, on the following afternoon, and the next, she contrived to be gazing absently from the window; and what with one thing and another, it was not surprising that before long Silvio was taking her to shows and dances.

First he had to run the gauntlet of her quick-tempered, heavy-fisted father and the mother who lived on a diet of paper-backed novels and cheap stock companies. But that was easy. Silvio had a job; he possessed a profile that belonged on a Greek medallion; and he liked to laugh. It was for the last attribute that the Shiner most hated him. But then, the Shiner was prejudiced; all his suave overtures to Viola were lost in a disdainful sniff and the rustle of taffeta petticoats.

Three evenings a week, not counting Sundays, young Silvio shed his corduroys, his checkered blue blouse and his cap with its badge of peonage to the express company, squeezed into a pegtop, many-buttoned suit, and swung blithely across the bridge. The chances were that he would be whistling or humming over what awaited him at the far end, and the Shiner would work himself into a palsy of fury about it where he stood in the American Beauty Saloon—for this was long before Rose Street had become the commercial backwater it is today.

"He comes down the stairway, the curly-haired Brooklyn ape," rasped the Shiner. "And there she is, posin' at the first turn to ease him a kiss. She goes out with a couple other fellas, once in a while, but this one has the inside track. I can tell by the silly look on his mush— Well, he won't get her, because she's made for me!"

"Her old man threatened to snatch you baldheaded if you made a play for her," reminded some one. "Remember what he called you, only last week, when he happened in here for his growler of suds? 'A cheap, ratty little crook,' he says, 'with a soul as narrow as the crease in your pants.'"

"Aside from that," said the Shiner, who was inordinately proud of being able to live by his wits, "what if I pull off somethin' that'll give me a regular stake? What if I'm in a posish to move this gal up town and let her run wild in the clothes shops? Why, the old geezer will fall on my neck and be hittin' me for beer money for the rest of his days! I'm tellin' you, she was gettin' ready to smile my way when that gringo expressman come rollin' along. And I'll cut the gizzard out of

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him if he makes any more trouble! I'll—"

Idle words, all of them. The Shiner's laudable conclusion that man cannot live by crime alone was submerged in the jeers of the American Beauty's customers. In the end, Viola would marry a brakeman on the Central; a good man who prudently took her to live in a Westchester village and in the course of time provided her with several children who occupied most of her waking hours, and incidentally moderated the fulsome charms that eventually led Silvio into trouble.

FOR Silvio, the jaunty and carefree, was herded one morning into a musty courtroom to hear that he "did wrongfully sell two parcels of silk belonging to the Sheeno Silk Company, and convert to his own use the proceeds thereof."

Being entirely innocent, and therefore thunderstruck, Silvio made an extremely bad impression on the judge, who awarded him five years in Elmira. There was, of course, no way for either Silvio or His Honor to know that the Shiner and a henchman had engineered a frame-up, the mechanics of which are best hidden from the public consciousness.

Thus is Justice served.

Thus was the pathway of love swept clear for the Shiner, though before he could venture safely upon it Fate indulged in one of those infrequent cackles that make her half-way bearable. The very day that Silvio entrained for the western part of the state, a blue-jowled person with a Central Office badge apprehended the Shiner with his talons in some one else's pocket; and the Shiner, red with rage, drew a year on what is now laughingly called "Welfare" Island.

Rumor had Silvio, somewhat bewildered by his swift desertion by Viola, a good-humored prisoner. But the details are unimportant.

And in the meanwhile the kaleidoscopic life of Rose and Pearl Streets shook itself into another jagged pattern. Along came the brakeman, and for Viola, the stairway flirtation dissolved into the mists.

To the Shiner, with nothing to do but think, the whole affair continued to seem like the day before yesterday. He couldn't forget.

Consider him: small-time blackmailer, sneak thief and confidence worker. Although merely one of that stunted litter so prevalent in such districts, he now became a man enthralled by the driving force of a single idea. The Guinea had lost him his girl . . . lost him his girl. . . . The great winds of vanity and ambition blew against the Shiner's soul, leaving him spent and shaken. But month after month of imprisonment strengthened his purpose. Released from the Island to stem the full tide of human existence on some Bowery corner, he would suddenly feel the idea whip him breathless, and at such times he would make for the American Beauty. There, slinking with the velvety stealth of a cobra along the bar or the wall, or in through the door, he would give way to his emotion and thereby find the outlet requisite to anyone with murder in his heart.

"I'd have had her if it wasn't for that Guinea," went the Shiner's plaint. "And when he comes out I'll slit him like I would a hog!"

He entertained but little awe for the proper and legal climax of any such adventure, knowing the odds to be slanted in his favor; so that the American Beauty's regulars came to regard

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him as a future headliner who was worth listening to.

FOR two years and eight months they listened, at intervals, to the Shiner's absorbing passion; and then a late Elmira "graduate," while passing through, chanced to remark that Silvio had been credited with the maximum for good behavior and had been allowed to leave the State's college of correction. The Shiner celebrated this news with a new and talkative suit of clothes; he ground a slick seven inches of steel to a vicious point; and he sported a new pair of patent leathers even more glossy than those that had given him his moniker. The stage was now set, and the denizens of the American Beauty took a fraternal interest in the affair. This was exactly their dish.

"If he's out, you'd better be going after him," suggested one of them, ignoring the fact that to a true Manhattanite young Silvio, dwelling in Brooklyn, was as the sands of the sea.

"Not this baby!" said the Shiner with complacence. "He's comin' to me."

Pressed for an explanation, he was happy to be of service.

"I been keepin' this to myself," he told them, a pale tongue flickering at his lips, "but seein' you're all on my side of the river, I'll give you the low-down. This Silvio is comin' to me—and no buts about it. Why? Because he's a romantic slob; and he's that sentimental he won't be able to stay away. It's a cinch. I've heard him tell that two-faced twist she was the light of his life, and that when he turned into the Rose Street stairway he felt like he was ridin' the clouds. Told her if she died or anythin', he'd haunt the stairway just to sense her presence there—and a lot of other guff like you hear on the stage. He meant it, too; so my guess is he'll be comin' back. And when he does he'll find me waitin'!"

"With your knife?" asked a patron, hungrily.

"Sure, with my knife. And the big laugh is that the Guinea don't even know I'm sore at him, because I was too smart to let on. Here's the lay: he comes gallopin' down off the bridge into the stairway, maybe singin' some hurdy-gurdy tune like he used to; and there I'll be, at the first turn, leanin' against the wall and readin' a newspaper. It won't take no magician to slide the steel into him and topple him clear down the steps to the bottom turn, and two seconds later I'll be up on the promenade mixin' with the crowds. Why, I've dreamed of him spinnin' for the crash until I could draw pictures of it! There's very few people uses the shortcut; and allowin' for a quiet day, I can't miss."

Smooth, you see, as the proverbial satin. So smooth that the Shiner took to loitering on the stairway more than half the day, in order to spring the trap.

BUT as the months lengthened into years, and the years rolled on, and still the quarry didn't show up, the Shiner took to playing hunches. Sometimes, at the American Beauty, he would leave a drink untouched, would spring up and run out mumbling something about this being the time.

Half an hour later he'd return, grim-faced and bitter, to sit sunk in thought until nightfall took him uptown on the prowl for the credulous.

The talkative new suit of clothes was replaced by a succession of others.

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The Shiner began to gray a little, to grow more evil, and to develop a cough. But the Great Idea never left him. At odd hours he might be seen walking slowly to the bridge, and the regulars at the American Beauty would report that he could be glimpsed, half leaning, half sitting, on the handrail against the stairway wall. His hat was over his eyes as he scanned a newspaper, and supporting that paper was a bony hand whose wrist was chilled by the seven-inch blade that rested in his sleeve.

The regulars would tiptoe away shivering. Occasional coughing noises echoing up the shaft, they would declare grimly, held the hollow sound of the first shovelful of earth on a coffin.

But late one autumn evening rumor sifted down into Rose Street and burst flaming into the American Beauty. Some time during the shank of the afternoon the Shiner had arrived at some conclusion, *via* a hunch; and in deference to that decision he had stepped outside for a moment. And now, it was said, there was death on the stairway.

The regulars raced madly up to Park Row and back through the bridge approach just in time to see the Shiner before he was taken away. The Shiner was half leaning, half sitting on the handrail against the wall. But he was not holding any newspaper now and a shining, quite unstained piece of steel lay on the floor beneath his dangling arm.

The bridge superintendent was telling a couple of reporters about it:

"Yes, boys," said the super, and as they listened the regulars shook in the clammy wind, "this egg has stopped breathing. The police doc says his heart went back on him—the steps are responsible, I s'pose. And to judge by the way he propped himself against that rail he must have felt it coming on. Been dead a couple of hours, according to the doc; and the night man found him when he came on duty to close the gates— Yeah, the night man. He's been with us for years now—a guy by the name of Silvio."

THE END

Stretching a Light

A SINGLE electric light bulb in the lighthouse at Cape Elizabeth, Maine, can be clearly seen twenty miles away. If it were not cut off by the curvature of the earth, it would be visible much farther. An ordinary clear nitrogen bulb of five hundred watts is used. It is metered from a city electric supply and the electricity costs the government about ten dollars a month.

Such visibility would not be possible if it were not inside a revolving prismatic lens, every facet of which is cut to reflect the light into a single beam. The lens weighs five tons, but as it floats in mercury it can easily be turned by hand.

—*Delos White.*

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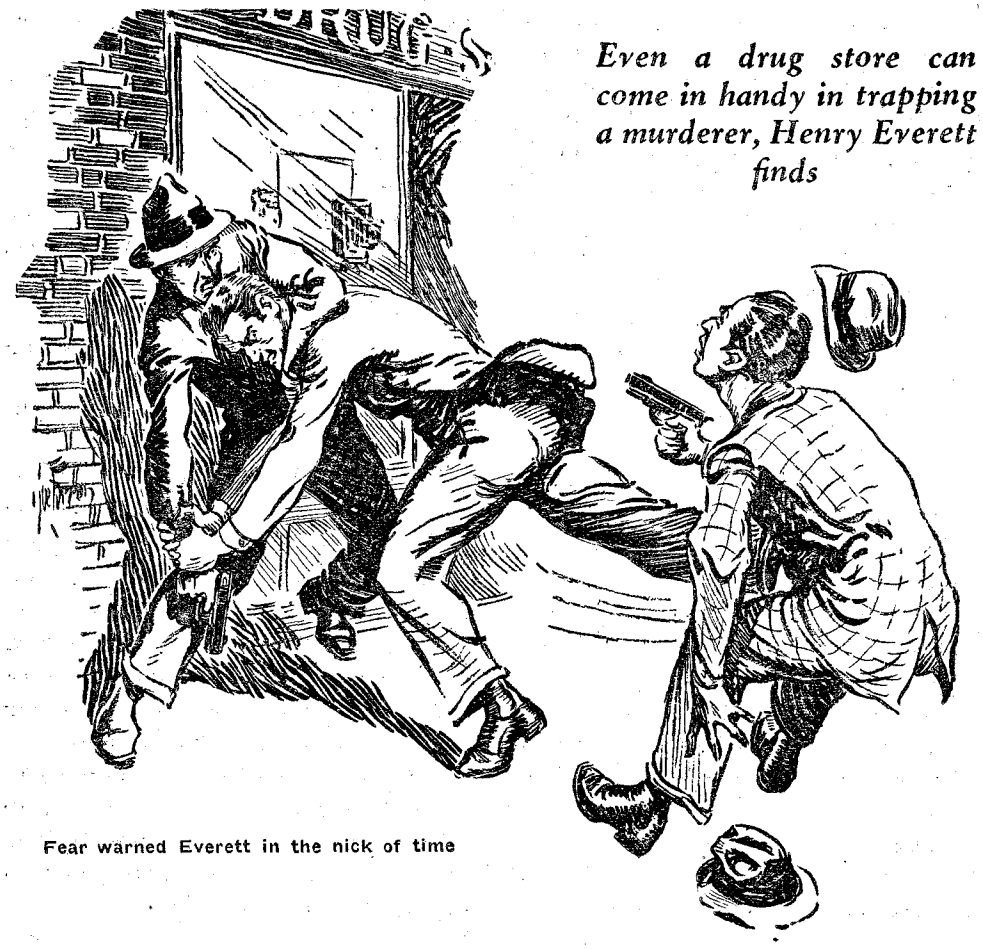

Fear warned Everett in the nick of time

Even a drug store can come in handy in trapping a murderer, Henry Everett finds

A Nickel's Worth of Life

By JAMES H. S. MOYNAHAN

HENRY EVERETT, locking his drug-store for the night, noticed the reflection of the two men in the darkened glass front of his show-window, and knew at once they spelled Death.

Everett did not want to die. Indeed, he wanted frantically to live. Not that Everett feared death. He could meet it bravely when his time came. But just now he had an urgent reason for wanting to live. The same reason that these men had for wishing him dead.

Big Tim Fahey had sent these men. Everett knew it instinctively. He had known something like this was bound to happen—had known it from the instant he had slit open the blank envelope someone had dropped by mistake on the post office floor in Everett's little drug-store.

The check the envelope contained told its own story—a sordid story of greed, of innocent victims needlessly slaughtered, of crawling fear, of frantic murder and, now—of bribery!

When they had brought home the tiny body of Henry Everett's little daughter to

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him with the miserable story of her death, he had sworn an oath that the man whose greed was responsible for her death would not escape the just penalty of his crime. A school bus, crowded with laughing, singing children, among them little Phyllis Everett, had skidded, crashed through a fence, rolled down a gully to crash finally into a tree at the bottom and burst into a flaming pyre for the innocent victims.

Evidence, when a tardy investigation of the busses was pushed, proved scandalously plentiful. The garage attendants, who had pleaded over and over that the busses were in a shocking state of repair—not fit to leave the shop. The drivers, whose gloomy jokes about " Fahey's Coffins " now proved a grim reality. Other children, more fortunate, who had survived to tell of narrow escapes on other days and in other busses.

The Governor had ordered an investigation.

Things had looked bad for Big Tim Fahey, big as he was in State politics. For once the Governor, old friend of Fahey's that he was, dared not come to the bus owner's aid. Public opinion, roused by the shocking deaths of these innocent ones, demanded an accounting. To have attempted to sidetrack the investigation would have cost the Governor himself his office.

Marvin, the State's Attorney, owed his position to Big Tim Fahey. From Fahey's own ninth ward, he had served the ruddy-faced political boss faithfully—bringing to the task a certain flair for the sort of cheap oratory that wins elections in districts shakier than the old ninth ward was likely to be.

State's Attorney Marvin, Fahey's man—his tool, practically—had been entrusted with the task of prosecuting the big boss for criminal carelessness in the conduct of his bus company!

From the start, things broke well for Fahey. The stories of the children were simple enough to break down—mere rumors, hysterical imaginings of immature minds—so Fahey's attorneys put it in statements to the press. Full-page advertisements, paid for by Fahey, and subtly worded to arouse sympathy for the company and its president, did nothing to antagonize the newspapers. The more corruptible of them, anxious for more advertising, even played down the investigation as a " political crucifixion." Fahey laid out money right and left, and the State's case dwindled before the avalanche of propoganda, bribery and outright threats.

All but one witness.

DOMINICK CIELLO was an attendant in one of Big Tim Fahey's garages. Ciello had worked on the busses, had seen them come in from day to day for repairs. With growing concern he had seen the most slipshod, hurried repairs made when what was called for was a complete overhaul, and resentment in his breast had grown into open revolt.

One morning Big Tim Fahey himself had come into the garage. Dominick, his natural fear of his boss's displeasure overcome by his indignation, had told Big Tim that the busses were nothing more than death traps, and asked him why he let them go out of the garage in that condition to save a few dollars.

Big Tim's answer was to fire Dominick.

When Dominick's little niece, a tot of five years, was lifted, unrecognizable, out of the mass of wreckage of the burned bus, the garage helper's rage was a terrible thing to see. The thought that this accident, which he had tried to prevent, had resulted in the death of his niece drove him frantic. He swore he would go before the grand jury with testimony that would send Fahey to prison for life.

Fahey tried to have him seen. When Fahey's emissaries—with fat check-books and fountain pens ready to write in any amount of hush-money—failed to get anywhere with the angry man, Fahey undertook to go and see Dominick himself.

What happened after that was never quite clear. State's Attorney Marvin, after an extensive investigation, announced that he was convinced that Dominick had committed suicide. The citizens—and they were many—who thought that Fahey had killed

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Dominick in a fit of rage, didn't like State's Attorney Marvin's decision.

Henry Everett, the druggist and postmaster, had been among those who believed Marvin's whitewashing of Fahey the rawest thing in years.

"Fahey must have slipped him plenty for *that*," was the general opinion.

It had been Everett's opinion, too, up to this evening—but only an opinion. Now it was more than that—it was a conviction. The blank envelope he had picked off the floor of his drug store earlier in the evening had contained, almost as if by Divine providence, the one thing necessary to prove Fahey's deal with Marvin—the check itself, made out to the State's Attorney, and signed by Big Tim Fahey.

That check—for fifty thousand dollars—would be to a harassed public the last straw, the crowning indignity in Fahey's long career of flouting the public. Fahey would burn for the murder of Dominick Ciello.

And now Fahey, or one of his henchmen, had discovered the loss of the check. Fahey knew that by the irony of fate, the check had probably been dropped in the post-office, and that Everett had found it. That check meant life or death to Fahey. He wasn't going to let life—or death—stop him from getting it back.

But Henry Everett had some ideas on the subject of that check, too. He had the memory of a laughing, singing child, his daughter Phyllis, who now, because of Big Tim Fahey's greed, would laugh and sing no more.

And only death itself would stop Henry Everett from handing that check over to the authorities—into hands that could not be bought with Big Tim's greed-won money!

HENRY EVERETT pretended to examine the window display of soaps, cosmetics, cameras, patent medicines, while his brain, working madly, sought an out. The killers were approaching him from either side.

If he could get past the one closing in on his left, he might be able to make the security of his store!

In the darkened glass show-window, the slouching figures quickened their steps. Henry Everett whirled suddenly, darted for the entrance of his store.

The killers were taken by surprise.

The man on the left was the first to recover. He sprinted for the drug-store door, cutting off the druggist's retreat. His pal yelled: "Hey! Grab him!"

Too late Everett saw the wicked gleam of moonlight on the nickeled revolver in the hand of the thug blocking the drug-store door. The druggist's body was already hurtling through the air at his assailant when the pistol swung up, crashed its flaming message.

Everett's body slammed into the thug's. Gassy smoke from the pistol made him cough. He wondered if he was hit—you didn't feel it at first, they said.

But if the pistol in the thug's hand spelled possible death for Everett, it helped him, too. The second thug, ready to leap on his back, froze in his tracks as the pistol cracked.

"Hey, you dumb fool!" he yelled at his partner. "You trying to plug me?"

Everett battled desperately, wondering dimly why he didn't feel on his back the weight of the other thug, bearing him down. The pistol swung for his head. He ducked, felt it rake his cheek, felt the warm blood flow out.

He grabbed for the pistol.

Luck was with him. His wildly clutching hand struck the thug's wrist, closed on it in a grip that was like the clutch of death itself.

Together they swayed, twisting, straining, grunting. Their bodies slammed against the building. Everett felt his skull crash against the wood. Was he going to faint? His hand, holding the thug's wrist, started to slip.

Behind him sounded the shifting feet of the second thug.

Everett felt himself yanked away from the wall as the thug tried desperately to free his pistol arm. After all, why not

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just give up? Death was peaceful—a rest from the greed and violence of this world.

Death! The echo of the word in his brain awoke remembrance. Death was what Big Tim Fahey had brought to little Phyllis. Other children would die, now, if Fahey escaped. And Fahey would escape if his thugs were victorious!

Henry Everett lashed his failing senses, clutched the thug's wrist with both his hands and bent forward to strain at the captive pistol.

Behind him the second thug's heavy breathing grew closer. And in a flash Everett realized what had happened!

He, Everett, was now holding the pistol pointed safely at the ground so that the second thug could close in!

FEAR warned him in the nick of time. Behind him the warning scrape of the thug's feet sounded, poising for a leap!

Everett's mind worked like lightning. He brought up his right knee, flexed it, drove his heel out backward at the flying figure of the thug leaping for his shoulders.

The heel caught the thug in mid-air, bent his body in the middle. He yelped in agony, piled down on the sidewalk, clutching his belly, groaning, cursing.

Everett worked the thug before him around until the man's back was toward the grovelling figure on the sidewalk. The druggist began to yank hard on the pistol, pulling forward.

The thug resisted. The whole force of his body was exerted in drawing the pistol away, and toward the man behind him on the ground.

That was just what Everett wanted.

Suddenly he relaxed, shoved the pistol away from him, toward the straining thug.

The man, caught unawares, went stumbling backwards, all the released force of his body carrying him, off balance, back toward the body of the man who lay on the sidewalk, directly in the path of his stumbling feet.

Henry Everett let go the pistol, spun.

The thug's feet struck his partner and he went over in a whirling cartwheel, the pistol flying from his startled hand. Everett, at the door, pawed over keys, found the right one, twisted it, yanked the door open, slid in, locked it!

For the moment he was safe. The shot had attracted no attention. The good citizens would probably think it had been a backfire of some car. Big Tim's men would probably not dare to crash the store. The sound of breaking plate glass would bring the radio patrol in an instant.

The telephone! That was the answer.

Everett hurried to the booth, stumbling over displays in the gloom. The phone booth lighted up when he closed the door. He fumbled in his pocket for a nickel.

His change was gone!

The shock stunned him for a second. Then he realized what must have happened. In the struggle with the thug, the money had rolled out of his pockets.

Fearfully he put a hand to his breast pocket. Had he lost the check, too? But no, it was there, safe, like an avenging angel that would put a stop, once and for all, to the evil deeds of Big Tim.

If Everett could find a nickel to telephone!

The thugs outside would not wait long. Already they were probably prowling the back, seeking a way in.

Everett knew the cash register was empty. He had cleaned it out, sent the money to the bank. The safe contained money, plenty of it. But you can't put a dollar bill in a telephone slot!

There *was* a nickel somewhere in the store. Everett knew that for a fact. The only trouble was to find it. He had heard it roll on the floor when he had dropped it earlier that evening, but a search had failed to disclose it.

HE hesitated. Should he search for the coin, taking the chance that Big Tim's thugs would have broken in the rear by the time he should find the coin?

No. The chance was too great. He had looked for the nickel earlier and failed to find it. Time was precious. He would

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have to try to break out the back way and run for it!

The store was dark; he had opened the phone booth door again, cutting off the light. On tiptoe he made his way to the back room, with its cartons, its bottles of drugs and medicaments, its shelves, barred window, grilled door to the yard—protection against robbers.

He peered out. He could see nobody. With trembling fingers he fumbled for the key, inserted it in the lock, turned it. The door swung open. He slid out, closed it with infinite caution.

The littered yard was quiet. Cautiously he explored its shadowed corners with his eyes, seeking out any lurking figure who might be lying in wait, ready to pounce on him should he essay the distance to the alley.

The yard seemed clear.

Swiftly, making no sound, Everett traversed the brick walk to the alley door. He lifted the catch, swung back the battered wood on its creaking hinges . . .

At the mouth of the alley, a watching figure broke into a run. Everett saw it, hesitated, turned and raced for the other end.

A gun roared behind him. He felt a giant hand slam him forward, stumbling, to his face, as the slug took him in the shoulder.

He rolled on the ground, saw the alley door, still swinging open, a few yards away, saw the thug, up the alley, come racing down, pistol swinging at his side.

Everett stumbled to his feet. The thug stopped running, swung the pistol up. Everett half-fell inside the door to the drug-store yard, rolled against the battered door, closing it, spun the latch.

Running feet sounded outside.

Everett stumbled to the back door of the store, yanked the latticed door wide, went through it, and slammed it shut. He slid the bolt, stood there, panting and trembling, blood dripping from his wounded shoulder to fall in slow, soft splashes to the sawdust and excelsior-strewn floor.

The window was barred with iron. The thugs could not get in that way. The iron lattice covering the back door's window would hold them off effectively from trying to enter by that way, unless they were ready to throw all caution to the winds and make noise and commotion enough to rouse the neighbors and the police. Everett didn't think they were quite ready for that yet.

If he could just find that lost nickel!

FROM the stock of electric fans, cameras, toasters, and electrical appliances he took a flashlight, sent its cone of light into the dark. It picked out cigarette-butts, dust, wads of chewing-gum on the worn board floor. But no nickel.

The street outside was quiet. Everett knelt, poked his beam of light under show-cases, cardboard displays, wire soda-fountain chairs.

Something round and shiny gleamed in the ray of his flash!

With a smothered exclamation of joy, Everett stooped, rescued it. The nickel!

A bell rang sharply in the silence.

It was the telephone.

Everett hurried to it, pushed inside the booth, reaching for the receiver with his left hand. His right arm, numb from his wound, hung at his side. He let the door stay open, so that the booth remained dark.

"Hello?" he murmured into the transmitter.

A hard voice said shortly: "Listen, Everett, we ain't foolin'. We know you got that check, and we'll give you just five minutes to come out and hand it over."

A red mist swam in front of Henry Everett's eyes. He gripped the door handle to keep from falling.

"You tell that murdering boss of yours," Henry Everett said, "that I'll see him in hell before I'll give up this check. He murdered Dominick Ciello to keep him from testifying, and he murdered those innocent children that died in his death-trap of a bus—just to satisfy his mad greed! Well, you go back and tell him he'll have to murder me before he'll destroy the evidence I've got against him!"

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"Don't think he won't," the voice said menacingly. "Now listen, Everett, you're just acting like a dumb fool! We've got pineapples here. Big ones. We're giving you five minutes to hand over that check. Come out nice, and nothing will happen."

"Suppose I don't?" Everett said.

"If you're not out of there in five minutes we toss the pineapples! We mean to get that check and nothing's going to stop us!"

Everett's mind raced desperately. He leaned over the phone, made his voice sound frightened, whining.

"I got to think this over," he stalled. "You're giving me only five minutes. Can't you make it ten?"

"Nothing doing. Five minutes. No more, no less."

"But—" Everett protested.

The line clicked dead in his ear.

Quickly he fumbled out the nickel, dropped it in the slot. He rattled the hook. "Operator! Operator!"

His eyes went wide. He listened, painful realization spreading itself over his tortured face.

They had cut the wire!

In the stillness of the little store the clock on the wall ticked away the five minutes.

THE door to the drug store opened. Henry Everett came out listlessly. He removed his coat, and an impromptu dressing laced with adhesive tape hid the wound in his shoulder.

Slowly, with leaden steps, he crossed the street.

The two men crouched in the doorway lifted their pistols cautiously at his approach.

"No tricks, now!" one of them warned in a hoarse whisper. "We got you covered, and we'd just as soon blow the top of your head off! Where is it? Quick!"

Henry Everett held out his hand lifelessly.

One of the men stepped forward, snatched the check from Everett's listless fingers. Swiftly he examined it by the yellow radiance of a street light.

"It's it, all right, Bill!" He turned to Everett. "Okey, chump. You can go now. By rights I owe you one for that clip you give my partner, but I guess this evens it up!" He waved the check. "Wait a minute. Maybe you'd like to see something!"

Everett's eyes moved to the gun in the other man's hand. The gun was lined steadily on Everett's chest. The druggist turned back to the first thug.

The thug had brought out a paper packet of matches. While Everett watched the man struck a match, touched it to the edge of the check.

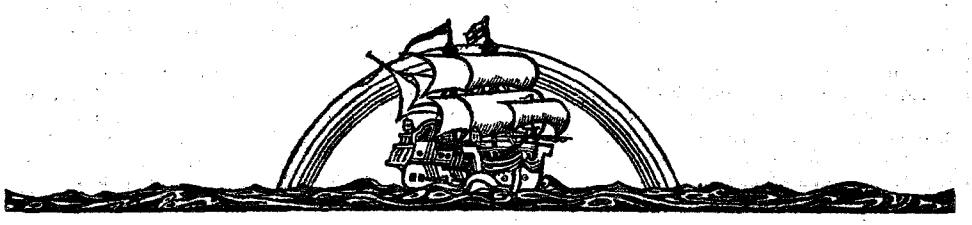
When there was nothing left of the che but a flaky bit of black tinder, the m ground it under his heel, turned to Everet

"Okey, chump. Now you can tell anybody you like you saw that check. And try and prove it!"

Everett hung his head. He was still standing there dispiritedly when the men got into a black touring car up the street and drove off.

Then Henry Everett walked slowly back inside his little store to develop the pictures he had taken of the check with a camera and equipment taken from stock—pictures of the check that were to be evidence that sent Big Tim Fahey to the chair for murder!

THE END



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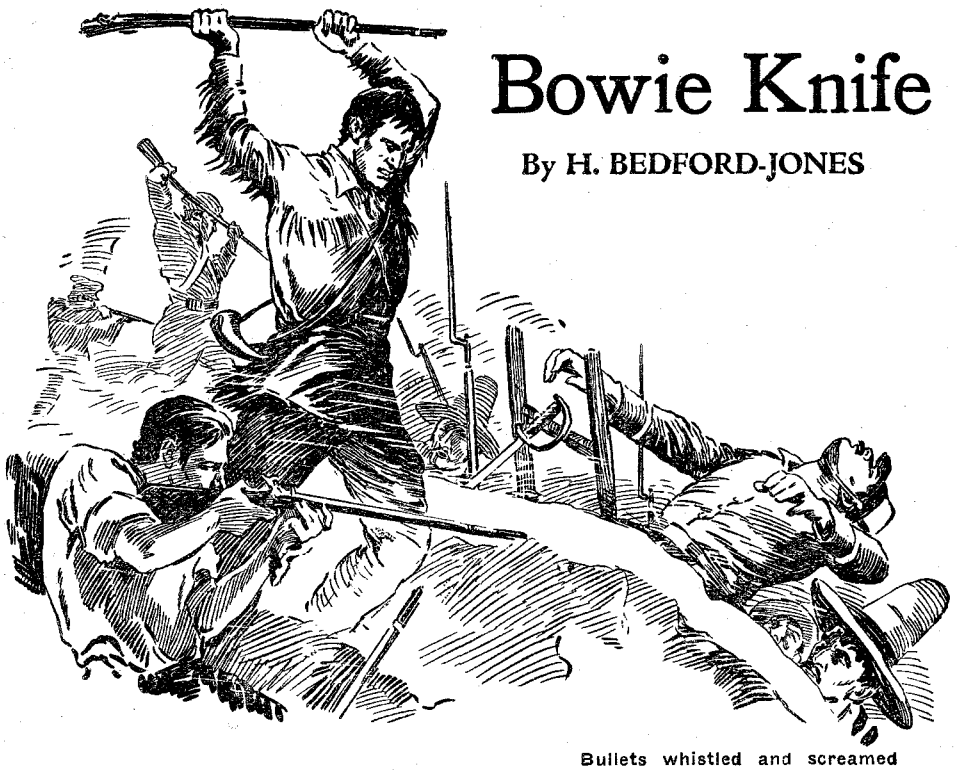

Bullets whistled and screamed

Bowie Knife

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Both Texans and Mexicans raised the red flag which meant "No Surrender"—and a grapple of armies that could end only in annihilation

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

THE night that Hugh Kenly accidentally killed a man in the Hotel Beausejour in New Orleans, little did he realize that he had fought and subdued the well-known Jim Bowie. Because of killing Bowie, Kenly has to alter his plans of proceeding to Texas to help fight for its freedom.

After the fight, Señorita Conchita, whom Kenly had befriended at the hotel, takes him to the house of Captain Don Rodrigo, who offers Kenly an officership and other honors if he will fight in behalf of Mexico. So Hugh sets off on a ship with the captain bound for San Blas. On arriving there the party proceeds to Goliad on the San Antonio River.

A party of Texans and Comanche Indians attack the party, but they are allowed to go on unharmed upon giving Bowie's knife (which has been in Kenly's possession ever since the brawl in New Orleans) as a present to Red Wolf, a chief of the Comanches.

Kenly is summoned before Santa Anna and General Cos. He is given the choice of either going to Mexico City as prisoner or leading an expedition to the rich San Saba mines. Kenly chooses the latter. He is outfitted with a small band of followers and supplies. Josefa, the pretty sister of the faithful Pablo, is a member of the party. Just as Kenly is trying to decide whether or not he will try to make his way out of Mexico and take along Josefa, who is in love with him, none other than the supposedly dead Jim Bowie makes his appearance and confronts them!

Kenly tries to explain about that night at the hotel, but Bowie does not trust him. Because of Josefa's intervention, Bowie decides to let him go. Returning to Bejar, General Cos claps him into jail.

The Texans attack the town, and Kenly is sent with Don Rodrigo to Santa Anna at Monclova. There it is learned that Bejar has been taken by the Texans. General Cos had surrendered. Santa Anna and his huge army push north to retake Bejar, but the river flood of the Medina stops

This story began in the Argosy for October 5

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them short. Kenly manages to slip away and beats his way alone toward the town.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RED FLAG.

A CARELESS garrison, indeed. No outposts in the approaches, no sentries, no patrols on duty.

Thus in the early morning Kenly entered town unchallenged. The mercantile side of the military plaza was spottily lighted; here, as betokened by high-pitched shouts and cries and snatches of song, *tienda* and *cantina, pulqueria* and monte bank were running full chisel.

The fandango continued. He could hear discordant revelry coming from El Plaza de la Constitucion, there beyond the darkly brooding mass of San Fernando church. Twang of smitten string, clash of castanets, stamp of feet, shout and laughter and applause.

Here between the two plazas, Kenly dismounted and briefly hesitated, when a figure wambling down the street addressed him; a sturdy, red-faced man.

"*Como 'sta, hombre!* Say, *mucha señorita,* savvy? Unnerstand? No fandango for me; *mucha señorita.* You know? Will you be takin' me to a fine lass, now?"

"Speak English, do you?" said Kenly. "Never mind the girls. Where can I find Jim Bowie? Who's in command here?"

"Hooray for Texas!" came the maudlin response. "It's like a hard winter ye look, me lad. Who's in command? Devil a soul of us knows. Bowie is by his own account, Travis is by his, and the two of 'em cat and dog. Ward's the name, me lad, Cap'n Ward of Texas, and not so long from Ireland either—"

"For the love of heaven, where can I find Bowie?" burst forth Kenly.

"And where should he be but takin' his dram like a gentleman along with the rest? Ye'll find him in La Tienda Americana over in the next plaza. Tell him Cap'n Ward gave ye the countersign, which is 'To hell with Santy Anny.'"

Kenly hurried on. He was drenched, thinned by fatigue and privation, hard as iron, burned browner than any Mexican by sun and wind, his hair uncut, his features bearded; a scarecrow object, but so driven by determination that men made way and gave him wondering glances.

American Store it was, but a liquor shop. And deep within it, four men seated as by easy authority. One man Kenly knew, even by profile. Bowie, comfortably slouched, in Mexican velvet jacket, g[illegible] with a brace of pistols. Another he k[illegible] the bearded Travis, in trim gray uni[illegible]. The third, with back turned? Coo[illegible]n cap with stripe-ringed tail, leather hunting shirt, and suspended powder horn—Kenly's mind leaped at a stride five hundred miles to New Orleans and a table there. Davy Crockett of Tennessee! The fourth man at the table was a stranger.

The room, aflicker with the smoky light of candles, held only these four men and the liquor vendor. From the plaza, the lusty, revelrous, blood-heating music of the fandango swept into the place. Kenly came up to the four, who stared at him with varying gaze. A glance showed that Bowie was ugly drunk, Crockett happily touched, Travis slightly elevated, and the fourth man unaffected, keen-eyed, silent.

"Who's in command here?" demanded Kenly abruptly. His voice seemed to waken recognition. Travis spoke up eying him keenly.

"I command the regulars and artillery; Colonel Bowie the volunteers. What's that to you, sir? Who the devil may you be?"

"Santa Anna's at the Medina with his whole army. It's in flood, but as soon as he can get the ammunition wagons and artillery across, he'll be here."

There was a short burst of laughter. "Likely story," said Travis. "Where'd you pick it up?"

"I was there," said Kenly. "A prisoner. I marched up from Monclova. I tell you, the whole Mexican army is—"

"Ha! You damned renegade—now I know you!" burst out Jim Bowie. His icy blue eyes were two frozen pools, malignant. "This is my man of the knife."

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"Hurray!" erupted Crockett with genial good nature. "Have a horn o' liquor, stranger. Thar's something in that thar phiz of yourn—by the Etarnal! You're the feller, sure enough, nose or no nose! Here, warm your gizzard with a horn—"

"Listen to me, you drunken fools!" Kenly's voice drove down at them. The force of his personality, the agony of his brain, the intent, resolute dominance of him, suddenly swept everything aside, held them spellbound.

"I tell you, Santa Anna's got his whole army at your very gates. You call yourselves soldiers! Not a patrol posted, not a sentry. Spies have told him everything. He hoped to cross the river and catch you here at the celebration, tonight. He's with the first column himself—the army's sweeping up in four divisions."

"He's a damned liar," growled Bowie, yet impressed none the less. "How many in his army?"

"Six, seven thousand—I don't know exactly."

"Give the feller a dram and he'll make it ten thousand," said Crockett jovially. "Like a congressman figgerin' votes."

"On the contrary, sir," said Travis with chill mien, "we know Santa Anna cannot get here before the middle of March. There's not an armed Mexican on Texan soil. This cock-and-bull story of yours—"

"One moment, Travis." The fourth man intervened. A countenance open and well favored, a keen, appraising eye. "I'm enough of a lawyer to know when a man speaks the truth. My friend, I'm James B. Bonham of South Carolina. Now, give us your name and let's have this story. Damme if I don't believe there's something in it."

CROCKETT shoved out a stool. "Sit down. You're shaking on your pins like a blown gobbler. Here, take this horn—sit down! Talk!"

"I'll not sit in company with the rascal," grunted Bowie, but he sat all the same. Kenly sank on the stool, caught the liquor from Crockett's hand, and downed it.

"My name's Kenly," he said. "I stole out of camp, got a horse, killed a sentry—and got here. Santa Anna aimed to shoot me when we reached Bejar. Cos sent me down as a prisoner, the same night the fighting started here. Gentlemen, you've got to believe me! I tell you the first column's across the Medina!"

"Twenty miles away? Impossible," said Travis, but frowned. Crockett laughed out.

"Cock-a-doodle-do! The boys are cutting pigeon-wings with the gals—most of 'em has sold their rifles for liquor. If Santy Anny's coming, let him come along—"

"This rascal's a damned spy," shot forth Bowie furiously. "Throw him into the guardhouse and investigate him tomorrow!"

"Hold, gentlemen; this warrants attention," intervened Bonham. "If this news is true, Travis, what then?"

"Damned if I know," said Travis bitterly. "We can hold the Alamo until Houston brings up an army. We've men enough."

"Santa Anna knows," said Kenly, "that you've not two hundred and fifty men here."

"Well, we took the town with only three hundred!" snapped Bowie. "And all these talking patriots will send us no help unless Sam Houston can whip 'em into action. But Fannin has four hundred men at Goliad. They'll help."

Suddenly Kenly realized that the tension was lifted. He was believed. He leaned forward and began to speak, rapidly. He told of that march northward, of the Mexican army, its composition, its gossip, its orders of no quarter to rebels.

The four men became intent upon his words. Even Bowie, although not losing that malignant scowl, was now regarding Kenly less than his words, the pictures he was painting. Then, in the midst, Kenly faltered. His animation flagged; the liquor had died out. He refused more. Hunger and exhaustion claimed him.

"What's all this to you?" demanded Travis bluntly.

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"I'm an American like yourself," said Kenly. "Through no fault of my own, I've been on the wrong side. Mr. Bowie, here, may not trust me—"

"You bet I don't!" Bowie's fist slammed down on the table. "Into that back room with him, Travis. You hear me? This fellow's up to something. There was some trick to get Cos—I don't remember it now. Black treachery. He failed us there, took to his hole. And now he's back. Hold him in that rear room. What d'ye say, Travis?"

Travis spoke impatiently, with color high. "We're all talking in a circle. At the Medina? I'd have heard of it. More likely, Santa Anna's at the other side the Rio Grande. And yet—"

"Hold him. I demand it!" roared out Bowie, his blue eyes filled with fever glints. "Clap him in that back room and do it now. Let's look into this!"

"I'm not running," and Kenly's gaze swept them disdainfully. Bonham gestured slightly to him, and rose.

"Your pardon, gentlemen. I'd like a word with this man aside."

While Bowie tiraded, Bonham spoke softly, rapidly, at Kenly's ear.

"Sir, your story rings true. Trust me in this. I beg of you; we can do nothing with Colonel Bowie. He's a very ill man. I know the symptoms. He's not responsible for his words. Egad, sir, you look famished! Let me take you into the back room here. I'll have some food sent in, instantly. Meantime we can look into the matter—"

Kenly gave way. Words failed him; he staggered suddenly, and went to pieces. Silently, he turned to the door opening at the back, and Bonham held his arm. A small room like a closet, none too fragrant, a cot along one wall. Then the light was cut off as the door closed. Kenly collapsed on the cot.

A candle-glow in his face, and he saw the lounging Mexican who kept the place putting down a plate of food, with a muttered word. Kenly sat up, wolfed the food ravenously, swigged down the mingled rum and water. The door was closed again. With utter relaxation, careless now of anything that happened, Kenly pressed out the candle wick and let himself fall back on the cot. He was asleep almost at once, to a tumult of argument and dispute from the four voices in the adjacent room.

LATER, he came wide awake in the darkness. The one window showed pale stars; it was still night, then. Kenly swung feet to floor, stood up, and went to the door. He tried it, found it unlocked, shoved it open.

In the room outside, a candle was guttering on the table. The Mexican w[illegible] hind his counter, seated, asleep. [illegible]ae table, head forward on arms, was [illegible]ie, snoring. Sprawled out in a chair [illegible]ain sunken on breast, coonskin cap over one eye, was Crockett. A faint gust of tinkling music came from the plaza outside. No sign of Travis or the other man, Bonham. Past the flicker of the sputtering candle showed the faintly gray dawn-darkness.

Kenly stepped forth, drank in the clean, moist air of the street. A great weariness oppressed him, a weariness of body and brain. He turned up the street, at random. His errand here was done. Travis was warned—let him look to it! Sold their rifles for liquor, had they? A fine garrison, this!

An open doorway, a glint of colored lights, drew Kenly's eye. He halted, agape, checked the weary dragging of his feet. Slowly the realization broke upon him. Candles, a red-flickering glint of color; two lights burning there. He was looking in at the open door of the church, straight at the high altar. The snores of men came to him. He stepped inside and saw figures stretched there, no doubt beggars or homeless men. The silence, the distant flickering light, the sudden peace, engulfed him. With a sigh, he sank down and let himself go once more into a drifting, dreamless sleep.

A pealing voice, a startled cry, brought him up. Up into daylight, blinking around. A sudden vibrant explosion, a musket-shot;

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then the clangor of a brazen voice overhead, a bell in the cupola. The sun struck down into the church—the morning was well advanced.

Kenly found himself, not in the church itself as he had thought, but in the entry between the doors. Down the ladder from the tower overhead feet were scrambling, a voice was blurting out something inchoate. Shouts lifted outside, the sluff-sluff of running feet; shrieks of women, cries of children, voices of men.

The roof above him drew Kenly with vague insistence, for no definite reason. He rose, went to the ladder, and mounted. Below came a crunch and crash of doors swung shut. No matter. The sunlight, warm and glorious and comforting, welcomed him with golden fingers. He came out to the parapet, a lone figure there above the town, his little presence unseen, unguessed by all the world.

To the south, flecks of color caught his eye; out beyond the town, on the heights of the Alazan, fluttering down toward the outskirts, the red and white pennons of lancers. Behind them, a glint and glimmer betokening the dragoons. Two horsemen fleeing in front of these videttes, scouring like mad for Bejar. Santa Anna, then, had come; or at least, his vanguard had come. Unopposed, unthreatened.

Kenly leaned forward a little and looked down upon the town below. In El Plaza de la Constitucion a roil of citizens shouting, running to and fro, gathering in groups and separating again; the slamming of shutters and doors, voices of dismay, confusion, terror.

Beyond, in the Military Plaza, a quick outpouring and gathering, a swelling of rallying ranks. So close that in the clear ardent sunlight Kenly could see the faces and figures clearly. Travis, with his red plume of waving hair, Bowie, the sturdy figure of Crockett; mustering, ordering, forming the ranks. Flash of sword, glint of musket and rifle, and a ringing American cheer, a wild "Hurrah!" They set off on the march. Not out toward the enemy, but off toward the Alamo, a half-mile distant. Passing the church, on through El Plaza de la Constitucion, on for the river and the fortress there. Civilians swung in behind the column, women, slaves or servants.

Kenly glanced south again. The lancers were at the bottom of the slopes now, and behind them a company or two of dragoons, line upon line, with bugle notes adrift in the tremulous, sun-hot air.

Now for the Alamo—ah! Clear and distinct he found it upon its gentle rise beyond the peaceful river. A flag was running up; the flag of that Mexico whose constitution Santa Anna had destroyed, and for which Texas fought, green and red and white, with the date of the Constitucion midway. Figures of men were busy outside the walls, gathering cattle into the wide enclosures, bringing provisions from dwellings; and along the barracks on the right of the chapel, tending the guns and swinging them about. A few figures in one battery—that of the volatile Captain Ward, had Kenly known it—ready and alert. All else wild confusion.

NOW the column evacuating Bejar appeared crossing the river. Horsemen outflung to sweep in the herded cattle, others bearing straight ahead. Now from the town a single man galloping, spurring from the rear. He carried a baby; behind him a woman, his wife, arms clasped about him. Blue uniform, sword dangling; an officer, this. "Dickinson! Hurray for Dickinson!" lifted distant acclaim.

Kenly started suddenly; then relaxed again, his brown, thinned features hard and set. No impulse now, but reason and reason enough; Josefa! He had sped his bolt for Texas last night and somehow it had failed. No matter. Now for Josefa. What place better than this, unsuspected, unobserved? A little hunger or thirst was of small moment. A little patience were well spent. He settled down, a grimly intent figure.

The lancers deployed, the dragoons broke serried ranks, searching byways and

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approaches, circling out about the town. Through the streets, the populace swarmed in eagerness. *"Viva! Viva Santa Anna!"* lifted the voices. Thud of hooves, jingle of equipment, blowing breath of bugles. A column came down the street into the plaza; dragoons with green jackets, red *calzoneras* or pantaloons slashed with white, cuirassier helmets, carbines and sabers. File after file, filling the street, forming ranks in the plazas; and behind them came file upon file again, more dragoons, more lancers, swinging lines of ragged infantry. The plazas and the streets boiled with men and officers. The church itself rose like a rock in the surf; the voices, the clink, clatter and clank of spurred heels, tramping hooves and rolling wheels struck Kenly in the face like spray.

He drew back. He was more cautious now; as those troops marched in, their eyes were searching skyline and rooftops. He looked out at the Alamo. Upon the commanding ground to the north of the little fort appeared pennons, a glitter of cannon, a flag and the growing lines of tents. An armed camp here.

Kenly sank down behind the parapet and dozed again reckless what happened, now content to wait. If any mounted to this spot, there were timbers, brick, tools, over in the far corner, where some repair work had been abandoned, he could always hide himself there. The spot was ideal.

In the streets below, the march unending as the sun lifted high in zenith. Wagons, howitzers, the supply train. More troops. All Mexico flooding in vengeance upon the paltry levy of undisciplined rebels who had fled those dancing pennons to refuge behind fortress walls. Scant refuge there from Mexico!

Kenly dozed. Afternoon drew on. Fresh voices rose, and this time lifted him to the parapet again. *"Viva El Presidente! Viva Santa Anna!"*

A regimental band, or what was left of it, swinging along with brave stir of drums and trumpets. Behind, no longer coached but mounted on black charger, the gold-laced figure of the dictator, gallantly staffed by glittering aides. He came and went and vanished from Kenly's sight, and another guarded convoy drew in. The carriage, here, for which Kenly looked with devouring eyes. An aide was in charge of its escort. He watched it swing off and seek a house behind the palace of the governors, and halt there.

His pulses leaped. Hungrily he saw two figures descend, giantess and slender girl; they vanished within the house. The carriage went on. A sentry was posted in the street. Kenly sank down again. Josefa! At least, he knew where she was. He sat there, glowering, resolute brain quelling swift impulse; awaiting the set of sun, the darkness. Meet the devil halfway, indeed? Meet him before he started! This night he would burst the barriers of his evil destiny, once and for all. God would send the time, as Josefa said—had sent it already.

A bugle aroused him, its quavering notes swimming sweetly on the golden air of afternoon. Kenly rose and looked. Two officers with a bugler orderly bearing a white flag; they had halted, between the river bridge and the Alamo. From the fort came out two figures to meet them. Who? Too far to see, yet Kenly guessed at the erect carriage of Bowie. A moment's talk; then the Mexican officers wheeled about and galloped for the town. The bugler, trailing the white flag, pressed them closely.

A belch of smoke from the southwest corner of the fort walls. The heavy voice of the cannon rolled across the river and through Bejar, and in its wake followed a thin, distant medley of cheers. Then a shell from a Mexican battery on the east edge of town arched athwart the horizon and raised a burst of dust inside the fort. Other guns took the refrain. They raised other bursts of dust and spotted the fort walls with dun puffs of earth and smoke.

KENLY watched, thrilled despite himself, until suddenly he swung around. Feet were mounting the ladder; there were exultant, laughing voices. He

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had just time to fling himself at the far corner and crouch there.

Two privates and a corporal; here was a color squad, but the colors they convoyed were not those of Mexico. They paused as they fitted their burden to the halyards.

"This for rebels, eh, Diego?"

"They can read it well enough, by the saints! Up with it, hombres!"

To the staff above the cupola of the bell-tower it fluttered. With a laughing salute, a jeer, a gesture toward the Alamo, the squad departed again.

A square flag of solid red. Its crimson field, lifting in the light breeze, was a blotch of blood against the blue sky. It was the flag of "no quarter." Another like unto it fluttered out at the camp on the height north of the Alamo, as the sun descended. A mute but terrible voice that silenced the cannon with its eloquence.

Dusk descended. Upon the plain, the rising ground, twinkled the red Mexican campfires. Kenly paced restlessly, now to survey the Alamo, now to peer over at that street door where a sentry walked. He was chafed raw with the anxiety and bitter determination that filled him; it was hard to wait. The dusk descended into darkness and thin mist lifting from the river and channels. A blare of music and song drifted up from the town, the odors of food cooking were thick upon the air.

It was time—it was time! The tension broke. Kenly hurled himself at the ladder, paused for a moment, got himself in hand, crushed down his blazing eagerness. No slips now! He was done with all that.

He went down, he found himself in the entry. The outer doors were closed and locked. Inside the church, lights glittered as before. A few people, dim shapes in the obscurity, came and went by an open side door. He strode for it, passed the figures without a look, gained the door and was in the street outside, fingers gripping palms, his heart hot.

With all these thousands here, his presence was unnoted, lost. The town was quieting, save for ribald gayety in the shops skirting the plazas. Kenly strode on fast and heedless of anything but the resolve smoldering within him. The street, there; he swung into it. Empty, save for the sentry before the door, musket on shoulder. Empty! None to see, none to interfere. Kenly laughed harshly as the sentry stared at him and came to challenging halt. He made no response, save with a gesture that caused the fellow to frown in scowling bewilderment.

Then the blow, merciless; and another. The slump of body against wall, the clatter of falling musket. A leap to the door, hand and knee to the weight of it. Into the house burst Kenly, and upon candle-light. A black figure there, kneeling, the light of the wick touching a crucifix. The startled face, the gasping cry of recognition, and the candle snuffed under quick hard hand.

For a moment they clung, breathless, incredulous. Then Kenly whispered, "Quick! You go with me?"

"Thank God!" she half sobbed. "I have the knife—"

"Keep it. Come along. To the Alamo. We can make it!"

There was none to see or interfere.

CHAPTER XV.

TEXAS IS BORN.

"THEY won't hold off—much longer," said Bowie. He spoke with difficulty.

He had been lying here for the past week, on his cot in the alcove room. An upper room, this, at the chapel end of the barracks running out from the Alamo. Kenly had just come in. Josefa, devoted nurse, hovered close.

Bowie's twin pistols lay ready to the grasp; curved handles and long straight barrels, like moccasin snakes prepared to rise and strike. From his shirt front shone the silvered haft of the great knife; peace offering, at last accepted. Death lurked unseen in pistols and blade, but it lay plain to sight in the stern and wasted visage, in the cold thinned hand, of the man himself.

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His lungs, he complained, were bound with an iron band. Pain in breathing, sharp chills, fever, exhaustion. His voice was a rasping, fading whisper.

"What news? They didn't—lay into us quite—so hard today."

"No," said Kenly. "A week's cannonade and not a man of us hit. They've made a breath at the northwest corner of the plaza, though. Travis is filling it."

"Ammunition?"

Kenly shook his head. "Pretty low. We're saving the ball and grape."

"Holding off, are they? I mean — to hold out. They'll have—to come up here —I can't come down." A faint smile touched the dying face.

"Oh, Don Santiago, don't talk, don't talk!" cried Josefa softly. The sound of that voice was difficult to endure. She sat on a cowhide stool beside the cot; day and night, this was her post, her duty. Bowie brushed aside her words, her hand.

"I'll do as I like—still alive. What news, Kenly?"

"Not so bad." Kenly smiled cheerfully and patted the rifle he bore. It was Jim Bowie's rifle, turned over to him with hearty handclasp. "This pill-thrower of yours is running Crockett close. He got seven today, you got five, by my hand. They don't have the stomach for close grips. Those nearer batteries pay dear for every shot they throw into us."

"Damn it, can't see plain," rasped Bowie. "Those thirty—Mexicans still out there—where they tried to bridge the river?"

"Most of them," and Kenly nodded. "And plenty more with 'em."

"Good. If—if I could only—point a rifle. A damned hulk! Hundred and eighty men—to hold off thousands—do our best."

"Hugo, you must go, go!" urged Josefa. Her face was white. Her eyes, twin pools of light, were wistful and anxious. Yet they were serene, with the strange calm look that had settled in the faces of so many men in this place. "It exhausts him, this talking."

"Must have—news," came the deathly whisper. "Any word—from Fannin?"

"No. Travis has sent off the last call," Kenly replied. "He says if any reinforcements were coming, they'd have been here by this time. Probably Fannin can't get through with his four hundred men."

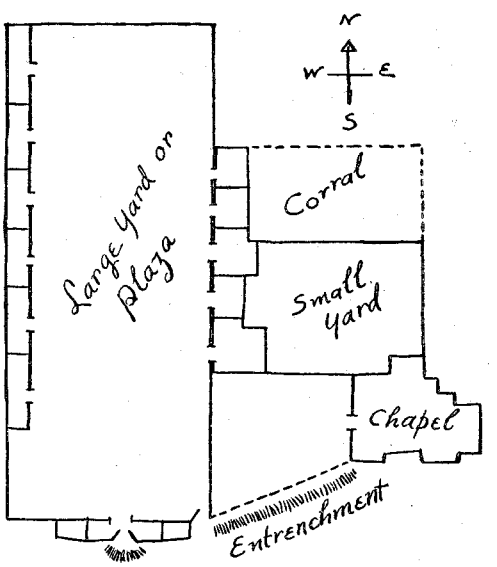
Bowie shook with a harsh, shallow cough.

"Old woman politics. No sayso. Pull Dick, pull devil. Fight our own battles! We'll—we'll fight 'em."

In the dusk, Kenly went down the stairs, leaving Bowie to Josefa's care.

General Cos had well fortified all this place. Kenly came out in the large walled yard or plaza. He made his way around into the smaller enclosure, the horse cuartel in the rear of the barracks.

Here, as being in better shelter than elsewhere, were the supper fires of the men off guard duty. Here too were women, on their way to and from the chapel that housed



Plan of Alamo Mission

them. Lieutenant Dickinson's wife, her babe in arms, Mexican women, loyal to their husbands—for there were Mexicans in the Alamo, as well as Americans.

A scene for an etcher. Rifles and muskets, haggard powder-smeared faces. Davy

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Crockett's coonskin cap, the beard of Travis fair in the firelight. Captain Ward the Irishman, jovial, but sworn to touch no liquor during the siege. Bonham from South Carolina, polished, high-tempered as a Toledo blade. Lieutenant Dickinson just in from posting guard, Captain Albert Martin the Indian fighter, to the succor with a hardy company from Gonzales. Firelight aglitter on stone walls, knives, powder horns.

The tricolor with its slogan of 1824 still waved above the chapel. The red flag still flew from San Fernando church. The Alamo had grimly outfaced another vicious deluge of shot and shell pouring in from dawn to dark, opening breaches, smashing walls. Rifle barrels were still uncooled, thumbs were blistered from the hot vents of cannon. Today, succeeding that hot bombardment, had been rather quiet, as though in sheer weariness of attack and defense. Yet the quiet held something ominous and sinister.

Reinforcements? Thirty-one men from Gonzales, under Martin, had broken through the lines in the night. Bonham, out on express service, had dashed in upon his creamy buckskin horse. El Colorado, the red-headed John W. Smith of Bejar, had been in and out, he was gone now on a last desperate appeal for aid. One hundred and eighty-three as Kenly counted them, actives. No more expected. The Mexicans had cut off the water supply. It was the fifth day of March.

FROM the misty black sky the stars twinkled faintly. From the darkened plain outside the walls, the wafted cries, repeated from point to point, of the Mexican pickets: "*Sentinela alerta!*" Out there, one approach unguarded, one way still open, perhaps to trick the defenders into leaving and catch them unwalled. Here, walls scarred by ball and shell, the main yard pitted by bursting iron. In this little court, the fires ruddily illumined the figures of squatting men, and with their altar flames set the shadows to dancing. The horses, behind their guard-rope, fidgeted.

As Kenly sat down, Crockett handed him a sizzling strip of beef skewered by ramrod spit, with a hearty word and jest.

"Work your jaws and you'll be as good as a congressman. Good thing we got a big hole in them walls. I'm lookin' for Santy Anny to come through. Once we tree him, if somebody'll pin back his ears and grease his head, I'll engage to swaller him horns and all."

There was a general laugh. Bonham turned to Kenly.

"How's Bowie?"

"Weaker. He says he'll hold out for the finish."

The gay, devil-may-care voice of Ward uplifted. "The finish, is it? That's what I'm holding out for myself, glory be! The sooner we finish this business, the sooner Jim Ward can be washing the dust from his gullet. Crockett, I'll guarantee to drink you under the table the day this is over and I can settle down for a bit of good honest drinking. What d'ye say?"

"Taken," and Crockett chuckled. "Santy Anny's got the b'ar by the tail. He has his choice of ends. Who was it said that a Texan army was a-coming if we held out for a spell?"

"Army be damned," said somebody. "There's only one man back yonder worth a damn, and that's Sam Houston. The rest of 'em's politicians."

"Hurray!" crowed Davy Crockett. "Boys, you never seen such ornery humans as them politicians—looks like they'd ought to be in jail and let the honest prissoners be turned loose."

"Thought you were a politician?" said Kenly. "In Congress, weren't you?"

"You bet," said Crockett. "In and out. I got in and was rascaled out. But I made 'em pay twenty-five dollars a vote to beat me! Yes, sir. They got Davy Crockett's hide, but they paid heavy for it. If I'd had one hundred and thirty votes more, I wouldn't have come to Texas to show you fellers how to aim a rifle."

So the talk ran on. The fires glowed and flickered, and sank to dulling coals. The shadows danced no more, but stole in

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nearer and closer. The men stretched out as they pleased, or sought sleeping quarters in chapel and barrack. Kenly, who had a blanket in the corner, stretched out.

A musket shot far in the night outside. Another. Warning, angry shouts from the Mexican pickets, post to post. Kenly sprang up; he did not know how long he had been asleep. Other men were up and about. These panicky shots in the night were nothing new, but nerves were frayed and twitched easily.

"Jabbering like donkeys they are," growled the voice of Ward. "Bad luck to the lot of 'em for spoiling my dreams!"

The shrill cries among the enemy outposts died away. Silence ensued. Sudden upon it burst forth hasty challenge from the Texan guarding the sally-port. "*Quien vive?* Halt or be damned, you—hey, Colonel Travis! Somebody come a-running!"

A mutter of parley, of excited voices, then the scuff of feet. Dim forms took body, a little group staggering into the court. The thud of a body dumped down beside a smouldering fire, embers kicked into a glow.

"Where's Colonel Travis? Here's a deserter or a messenger, dunno which. He talked English, all right."

Travis had come. The court was filling with a gathering of curious, grumbling men. The fire flamed up. The lax mass there upon the ground might once have been a man. It was only stuff of filthy rags, blood matted and flowing. Now the eyes came open, all bleared and questioning. They rested, with slow wonder, upon the uniform of Travis. A hand wavered up in salute with arm across chest, as the thing tried to sit up.

"Sergeant Devore, sir. Present and—and—"

Devore fell back. His eyes rolled, a noise was in his throat. Kenly knelt over him with a canteen, poured water between his lips.

"Devore! What is it? Where'd you come from?"

"Tomorrow Santy Anny—tomorrow—"

Devore's eyes bulged out, his voice failed. Then with a writhe and a great effort, he came half up again. "A bust! Double-shot the guns!" His voice suddenly rang forth. "Fix bayonets—here they come! Give 'em Gin'ral Jackson, boys—"

Smothered in a cough and a belch of crimson, the voice was gone. Devore was gone, with a sigh. He stretched out and the flow from his gunshot wounds ebbed.

"Ran the lines, eh?" said Travis. "Two of you men lift him away; we'll bury him in the morning. What was it he said, Kenly? Did he have a message?"

"I think he did," said Kenly grimly. "He couldn't get it out. Something about tomorrow. Not hard to guess what it might have been."

TRAVIS nodded in silence, frowning down. Captain Ward put in his word.

"Double-shot the guns, is it? Begad, I'd like to see it done! Devil enough left for a decent load all around, let alone double-shooting them."

"Was he warning us of an assault, think you?" asked Bonham.

"Hardly likely," rejoined Travis, with a shake of the head. "They're sure of us; they want to wear us down, now that they've cut off our water supply. They'll be slow to face fourteen cannon and our rifles."

"Maybe; but if them yeller gentry ain't snooping 'round out thar in the dark, then I'm an Injun! Who was this feller?"

"A deserter from the army," said Kenly. "Deserted in New Orleans and went into the Mexican service. I always thought him a blackguard and a scoundrel; but now I'm not so sure. Yes, he had a message, right enough."

"It's a pity dead men can't be living for the space of a little chat," said Ward, reflectively. "Tomorrow, eh? Bad luck to them if they bother us on a Sunday!"

"Bull fight day," said a voice somewhere in the darkness. "Bet a dollar that's the ticket, boys! It'd be like 'em to try and rush us tomorrow."

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"They can't drive us out." The voice of Travis broke over the others; it was calm, quiet. His face lifted. "We've all agreed, no retreat and no surrender; they can kill us, but here we stay. Still, I'm holding no man here. It's possible to get away. Any who so wishes may take a horse and go. The Gonzales men got in. Bonham got in. Smith and others have gone. Perhaps they're going to draw in their lines tomorrow and surround the place completely with a ring of cannon. That might be what this man tried to tell us. Last chance, men! Anyone who wants—"

"Aw, hell! Nobody's going. Save your breath," piped up somebody. There was a general laugh. Devore's body was carried away. Travis and Bonham, talking earnestly together, departed. Crockett touched Kenly's arm.

"Dummed if I don't smell Injuns! Come along and take a prowl."

Kenly nodded. Together they sought the west wall of the shell-pitted plaza, peering out toward river and town. Men slept beside the guns. Sentinels were on the alert. Out there, all was mist and starlight and obscurity.

Straining his faculties, Kenly fancied he could catch a faint and eerie noise, a jingling, a measured but hushed stir of movement, from the damp murk shrouding the river crossing. But he could not be certain. Nor could Crockett.

"They might be as lively out yonder as a Dutch cheese in the dogdays," grumbled Crockett, "but this fix takes the eyes of an owl as well as the ears of an ass. Betsy and I will wait till morning."

They clambered down again. Kenly sought his blankets, but the brooding mystery of the night, the taut nerves of him, kept sleep afar for a little. Bowie—this man Devore vomiting vain words and dying upon suspicion of last gallantry—the strange stirring silence of the Mexican outposts and batteries—what next? But he himself was here now. The devil had been met and broken. He was here among men who made him hearty welcome. Here where he belonged, for good or ill—and so, the tension departed, he slept, and smiled as he slept. All the Alamo slept.

"Up, men, up! To your posts! They're coming!"

A grip on his shoulder, a quick voice above him. Kenly was up on the instant, snatching Bowie's rifle and his powder-horn. Then he was stumbling, running, weaving among the other men, across for the west wall where it loomed ghostly in the pale gray of early dawn. Excited voices were gasping hot words. The plaza was rife with dim figures bolting hither and thither.

AT the wall now. Captain Ward was at the gun, mounted on its earthen platform midway of the wall; his gun crew were there, he was speaking sharply, coolly, gayly. Davy Crockett's figure loomed, peering forward like an Indian. "Betsy" ready in his hand. He welcomed Kenly with a grunt, no more.

The air was chill and thick. All sounds were muffled; but sounds there were, cautious, deliberate, as of a dragon-teeth host springing to life there in the obscurity. The darkness seemed to hold death in ambush. The hushed murmurs of men came from along the wall. The spark of the gunner's match was gently waving. Came the "tap-tap-tap" of ramrods shoving home down the line.

"Hooray for Jackson and New Orleans!" said Crockett abruptly. "If we ain't—"

The instant notes of an eager bugle sounded, repeated from point to point. A closer and higher cheer from many throats. The flares of rockets showering the sky with abrupt fire. No further concealment now; forth came the slashing strains of a hundred brasses, the thunder of drums, and all was plain to see.

There across the plain beyond the wall, a bristling column of men, cheering, bent forward at the double, bursting forward like swimmers breasting shallow surf.

"Take 'em two in line," grunted Crockett coolly. "You can spit a hull file—"

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"Here they are, boys! Give 'em hell!" That was the quick, high voice of Travis, beside the eight-pounder on the far right. Then came the thunderous explosion of Ward's gun, shaking the very wall. Grape hissed forth, and the storm-tools of the Mexican sappers were tossed above a swirl of plunging men, as the serried ranks were broken.

The gun beside Kenly exploded. The billow of smoke almost blocked his view; but now Crockett's rifle cracked. His own weapon was up; sights sought and found their mark, and came the recoil as he touched trigger. Then to reload swiftly, frantically.

Captain Ward was swearing mightily, his gun crew sponging and ramming like mad. Crockett was venting Indian warwhoops. All the stretch of wall gushed sulphur, cracked with fire of rifle and musket. The Alamo was a ring of gunfire, pouring death back upon the death that threatened.

In the turmoil and stress and uproar a man was two persons. Kenly, firing and reloading, firing again through the rifts in the smoke, was conscious of the things around. Crockett and his Indian whoops, Ward, furious and swearing; the reiterant voice of Travis pealing like a trumpet with its "*No rendirse!* No surrender, boys!"

The yelling enemy in columns there below, assaulting like a shadowy sea rolling up from all quarters; up above, Josefa, wide-eyed above the cot of Jim Bowie, and below, the women crowded in the chapel, Mrs. Dickinson with her babe! Ah, for one glimpse of Santa Anna's black charger there, beyond his rifle sights!

The tumult waned, the streaming smoke-spurts paused and lifted upon the gray light. The air was pealing with frenzied cheers, with hysteric laughter. Hurrah! The columns out there had fled the blast. The ground was littered with dead and creeping things, with muskets, ladders and axes.

Broken ranks were jostling and thronging to rear, officers and men alike.

So much for this side—what of the north? By the excitement there, the most determined attack must have been launched at the breach—but it was clear, clear! Not an enemy was within the enclosure; they were in full retreat there. None had won in from the south either—cheers were rising on all sides. Smashed them!

Gunners were busy swabbing out pieces, stacking up the little stands of grape. Captain Ward was wiping his face and swearing exultantly. "By the saints, there's a Sunday sermon for 'em!" The wall was rimmed with the shapes of men jutting above the parapet; powder-grimed faces, blinking and squinting, while hands nervously hefted powder horn and cartridge boxes amid jeer and jest. Travis appeared beside his gun in the northwest embrasure which raked the breach. His voice lifted; Kenly heard it, cool and assured.

"They're coming, boys. *No rendirse!* No surrender!"

Coming? Kenly whirled. Yes, the ranks were reforming. The men along the wall settled lower, their long barrels fringing the parapet. The light was stronger now. He could recognize the troops forming up again—the Zapadores or engineers, the battalions of Toluca and Matamores—three columns of them preparing.

Then music outburst. The blaring bands of the enemy, massed beyond the river, lifted a monotonous and savage air; it was pitched to a wild note that stirred the passions like the impelling beat of a fandango.

"*El Deguello!*" exclaimed a Mexican in the battery near Kenly. "The Cutthroat—what is played always for the killing of the bull. It means no quarter, *hombres!*"

"We'll teach 'em the devil's jig instead," and Captain Ward laughed gayly.

Again, again! The flood broke forward. Kenly could look now only at the column spreading for this western wall. Crockett's voice jerked at him.

"Pick off the ladder men. I call the whiskers in the red cap."

Betsy cracked; whiskers dropped, self and ladder. "I win the beef!" and Crockett laughed as he rammed in his charge. Another man was at the ladder,

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lifting it. Kenly's bullet dropped him. Another reached for it; Crockett's bullet was first. Smoke rose in a cloud; from end to end the wall erupted bullets that tore through this veil.

BELOW, spectral figures were stumbling, running, crawling; the van of the column had turned in upon itself as though withered by a scorching gust. Yet this time it did not break. It won forward, under the walls, beyond the reach of the cannon. Part of it flooded away toward the north side, shrinking from grape and ball.

Brief pause as the din dwindled. The flag still flew, the second assault had been blunted—but louder, more insistent, swelled the infernal *Deguello*. The smoke hung in the moist spring air, the dawn-light was mounting into the sky. Blunted and beaten—

Oh! No! Everything was drowned by a tremendous uproar to the north, by rapid explosions. Bullets were volleying from the ranks below, searching out the parapet, the riflemen, the gunners. This was the death grapple. The wall there was enveloped in the smoke of cannon, rifle and musket. "No surrender, boys!" Travis stood by the corner gun, shouting—ah! Where was he? Gone. A trickle of Mexican uniforms poured in at the breach. The trickle widened. The dam burst. A torrent came rushing in. Under the cannon muzzles now, so that the men on the parapet fired straight down. Then the parapets were cleared, the outer works were taken. There was a rush of defenders for the barracks.

Kenly heard scrape of ladder poles, the scrape of feet. A swarthy, sweated visage rose on the ladder there. Kenly fired and the figure vanished, clearing the others below him from the ladder. But there were other ladders. In the powder haze glittered uniforms. Men were rising to swing clubbed rifles. Bullets whistled and screamed.

"Off out o' here 'fore we're treed!" shouted Crockett.

"Wait, wait! Lend a hand!" Captain Ward's cry rose with shrill insistence. He pointed at the flood bursting through. "Two stands o' shot left!"

The gun crew were tugging at the trunnion. Kenly and Crockett lent their weight to the blocked wheels, deeply sunk in the furrows of recoil; the piece was mounted on earth fills. They swung it about. A moment later, it roared forth a stand of grape into the crowded foe thronging the north enclosure.

Ward's yell of exultation rose shrill. "Again! Load!"

A hornet flight of musket balls, spatting against the gun, against flesh. Men fell. There beyond, Bonham was gone now, like Travis. A surge of Mexican soldiery was inside, the Texans retreating to the barracks. A man fell against Kenly, bullets thudding into him. Then Ward fired, and the grape mowed terribly into those crowded ranks.

"Jump for it!"

Crockett was gone, Kenly after him, the others, such as remained alive, followed. Down and making for the barracks. A wave of the enemy swept forward to cut them off ere they could reach it. But no—Ward had not followed! He was swinging a rammer, there on the parapet—Kenly had a brief glimpse of him, of bayonets flashing, a brief catch of his gay, wild cheer—

Then it was body against body, gun against gun, hand against bayonet. Kenly won through somehow, with Crockett, or almost through. Another flood surged forward; he had vision of a keen, dark face, a sword thrusting at him—Don Rodrigo, of all men! Recognition came to both, suddenly, in a flashing glimpse. Then Crockett's rifle fell and smashed, and Don Rodrigo was gone.

Through, through somehow, a handful of them. The doorways of the barracks row were spitting smoke. Kenly gained the south end room, with Crockett beside him. Their smashed rifles were replaced by others—no lack of them now. Overhead, Kenly knew, lay Jim Bowie, and

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Josefa was there; no matter for her now, let her go with the rest.

THROUGH the smoke pierced the savage strains of the *Deguello,* over and over. The main battle had not started yet. The enemy had won the outer works, true, had silenced the cannon; but there remained the barracks row, with entrenched loopholes, with doorways, spitting Texan bullets. Here in the south room, the makeshift hospital, were sick and wounded, and a handful of others with Kenly and Crockett.

This whole barracks row commanded the outer works. The Texan rifles were speaking fast and furiously. Officers and men below were falling. The Mexicans wheeled around cannon and emptied them into the structure; they began to take the barracks room by room—pouring grape or ball into it, then charging.

Here in the south room, there was quick work—the sick and hurt could load, Kenly and Crockett and their men could fire. Quick and fast; the gold epaulettes died down below, until Crockett let out a yell.

"Watch out! The gun! Pick 'em off!"

Ward's gun was being worked around, loaded with solid ball. A howitzer was being sheeled forward for closer range; the rifles spoke out. Men died about the guns, but men were dying here, too. Crockett staggered, dropped his rifle; then he picked it up again and let out a war whoop as he passed it back for a fresh one. Blood was running down over his hand.

The cannon roared. There was a blast, a rocking burst of dust; the ball had torn clear through the corner wall, taking half of the south side away. Crockett whooped in derision, and fired on the men loading the howitzer. It was coming up point-blank for the door. Rifles and muskets were hot and fouled; bullets poured in by door and loophole, but still the Texan rifles cracked, rapidly, ever reloaded by the sick and hurt. The howitzer was loaded, a man leaped for it with the match. Crockett killed him. Another caught up the match—

"Look out, everybody!"

With the wild yell, Crockett leaped for cover. It was Kenly's last sight of him, though he heard the wild whoop once more from the stockade to the south. The howitzer roared. The entrenchment was fairly blown to fragments; the room was filled with grape, sweeping a devil's tattoo. Brains and flesh, dead and wounded. Still a rifle or two speaking. Kenly fired, fired again.

Once more the howitzer roared death into the room. Bloody bayonets flooded into the doorway, dark faces with them. Kenly flung himself at them like a madman, swinging the barrel of his rifle. No stock left; the iron swung horribly, crunched as it fell. They broke before him and the others with him. Then they came flooding in again.

Somehow, he knew not how, Kenly was on the stairs now. The thought of Josefa drew him despite bayonet and ball. Confusion and smoke and dust, and corpses underfoot. Then he was out of it all, out into peace and quiet above, and the silent room where Jim Bowie lay.

Kenly staggered in. The iron fell from his hand. He leaned against the wall, gulping air into his lungs. Josefa caught him; there was a taste of blood in his mouth. He could not speak or move. Before him the eyes of Bowie glittered cold and grim, the two pistols waited their prey. His knuckles were white on the grips. His horrible voice rasped out faint words.

"Get out—of the way."

Josefa pulled Kenly from the doorway. He tried to pick up the rifle-barrel and could not. He pitched forward on his knees, hearing Josefa's cry at his ear, feeling her arms about his neck. Hit, of course; no telling where. He was helpless. Blood was soaking his shirt. Josefa was tearing at it, ripping it away. Blood dribbled into his eyes.

Then the feet on the stairs. The infernal bedlam had quieted into scattering shots. The blare of the *Deguello* lifted triumphant. Shouts and shots came from the chapel below, no more. Quick spasmodic cries. And the strange protective

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silence of this alcoved room above was being broken now. Shadows darkened the doorway. A face was thrust forward, drawn back again. Kenly tried to rise, saw Bowie's eyes fastened on the door, saw the brief, grim smile on those death-marked lips. Then he pitched forward on his face, with Josefa trying desperately to hold him.

"*Muerte! A la muerte!*" The brisk order outside: to the death! Bayonets leaped in the doorway. Men burst forward there. The lifted pistols spoke out. Bodies fell; fell upon Josefa and upon Kenly as he lay unconscious. Blood flowed along the floor. The knife in Bowie's hand was flashing now. A crash of a musket, then another. The bayonets suddenly grew bold and greedy. They flickered down at the cot. The knife rose and fell, and the bayonets rose red.

Men yelled and shouted exultantly. The dead thing was lifted from the bed and stripped. Bayonets lifted it; upon bayonets it was lifted and passed and riddled, out and down the stairs, to be thrown among the others there and riddled anew. And after it poured the men—those that were left of them.

The massed brasses no longer blared their *Deguello* strain; they had ceased, crescendo. The smoke of battle had eddied away before the first breeze, venturing upon the scene like the breath of a timid spring. The sky was brightened for the coming of the tardy, regretful sun. And yet, not an hour had elapsed since the token of the bugles and the rockets, and the first tempestuous bars of the *Deguello*.

WHIMPERINGS, groans, anguished cries began to resound, everywhere. A white face, streaked with blood, lifted in the alcoved room above. Josefa, on hands and knees, then rising, shivering, her eyes dilating upon the dead men. She dropped again and her hands sought Kenly's head, his heart.

Suddenly she sprang up, she stood listening. Voices rose from below, laughing voices. Some sick men still alive were being dragged out. A quick, sharp order, a silence, then a ragged volley. Pale as death, she looked down at Kenly, and shivered.

Her gaze caught one of those who had first fallen. An officer, to whom one of those pistols had brought the end of earthly things. Josefa stifled a sharp cry, then fell upon him avidly. Something struck her hand; it was the great knife, silvered shaft sticky with blood. She caught at it. In a moment she had freed the dead man's braided jacket and was drawing it upon the limp, unresistant torso of Kenly. The wound there was ragged, but by no means bad. Another above his eyes, where a spent ball had landed and drawn blood. It was disfiguring; her lips brushed the poor hurt face. Then she got the jacket on him, caught up a red cap and jammed it over his head.

Now what—now what? She stood up panting, desperate. Voices reached her from below; the voices of Mexican women. She turned and went outside.

She could see them there, being led forth out of their huddled refuge in the bloody chapel, nine or ten of them. An American woman, Señora Dickinson. But no child now; the child lay with the father. Just the woman. Her eyes roved about. Search parties were lifting out wounded Mexicans, jabbing red bayonets into any Texans who still lived. One of these parties caught her attention, one figure leading them. The name leaped to her lips.

"Pablo! Oh, Pablo!"

The pock-marked face looked up. Pablo saw her.

Late night; dawn an hour away. A shielded candle threw stealthy glow. It dwelt on the pock-marked face of Pablo, the anxious loveliness of Josefa, the hard bandaged visage of Kenly, whose eyes glittered from beneath the bloody cloth. The hut was empty except for these three. Other huts around, here between town and Alamo, echoed moaning voices, the irritant cries of wounded men.

"Among the wounded, eh?" said Kenly. He understood now. "Thanks, my friend; thanks. And you?"

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"I stay," said Pablo. The stolid man was broken. Nerves shattered, a febrile hurry in his eyes and voice. He leaned forward, muttering swiftly.

"I have a horse ready. You must do it now or never. You and she both. With dawn it is too late. Wood has been gathered day and night; they are moving out the wounded, tearing down these huts. The bodies are to be burned; the Texan bodies. It is an insult, as one burns dogs. Our own dead will be buried. All are dead. If you're able to ride—"

"I'm able," said Kenly shortly. "Sentries?"

"There are none here. I can take you out, see you off. In another hour—"

"Do it, then. Help me up."

KENLY stood on his feet. He was stiff and sore and weak; shattered outside and in, but it must be done. Josefa's arm was in his.

One horse, and enough. It was Spanish custom for a lady to ride in front, sideways upon the lap of her cavalier. Josefa laughed a little hysterically under her breath as she settled into place. A handgrip with stout Pablo in the darkness; then off.

Silence; the clod-clod of the horse heading into the northeast, following the unguarded road. Faces to the dawn, the first twitter of birds lifting among the trees. The movement hurt, but Kenly set his teeth grimly. After a long while Josefa broke the silence.

"It shall be for Texas, then?"

"For Texas," Kenly echoed. "And forever, my heart."

The sun streaked the east red and gold. They halted. Kenly drew rein, white and haggard, at limit of endurance. The sunlit warmth of morning was grateful. He slid to the ground, tore off the braided jacket and dropped it with a gesture of abhorrence.

Then he sat staring at the sky. Peace ruled the deep blue and the greening earth. The hand of Josefa crept into his and he gripped it hard. She was pointing. From their height, there was a red dot that punctuated the horizon—the flag still floating from the church of San Fernando. And, against it, blotting it out, lifted a long pillar of smoke and then another, floating straight up into the sky.

"The burning," said Josefa, and shuddered. "Dead, all dead."

"No!" Kenly drew a deep breath. His head came up. "Not dead; never that. What of it? Death is only the beginning, my heart. The beginning for them, for us, for everything; the beginning, always! Life's dead behind us, yours and mine. We begin again, you and I, together. For them—yes, for them, too, life begins. Texas begins. Wait! You'll see. Texas is born—"

His voice failed and died. After a time she spoke softly, as Kenly's hand caressed her slim cheek.

"Here, Hugo; look at it. I think Don Santiago must be glad now that we have it again. See how bright the handle and the blade! Take it, as a gift from him; for after all, he thought well of you." She thrust the knife upon Kenly, then looked up into his eyes, questioningly. "Do you think they'll burn Don Santiago, too? Surely not. He was too brave a man—"

Far away the words were echoed, where El Presidente General Don Antonio Lopez Benemerito de Santa Anna was looking down upon a stripped and bayonet-slashed lump of clay. Hesitation came upon him.

"Too brave a man to meet the fate of a dog," he muttered. He looked at the blazing sacrificial pyres; of the bodies there, by record, were *ciento ochenta y tres* —a hundred and eighty-three. Then he shrugged and turned away.

"No matter! No matter!" he said carelessly. "Throw him in."

THE END

Another great Texas serial by H. BEDFORD-JONES will appear in later issues of ARGOSY

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WHAT Arthur Hawthorne Carart wrote to us about "Rodeo," his magnificent story of the *professional* West:

". . . I can say to you, positively, that this is true rodeo; the way they play to luck and give it credit for a lot that happens; the fierceness of the contests, and all. The angle of the best arena men having to fight to keep the professional gambler element out is distinctly a present-day problem: that and the pool-and-split racket. I talked to Joe Cahill, Bill Haas, Ed Storey and Bob Hanesworth, a long session each, before I started to write my story, and this angle of keeping the rodeo on the clean plane of amateur athletics—that is, high contest—is one of the things those boys hammer on all the time. The ranch people are the ones who do the reckless things; and in this atmosphere, so different from that of their range homes, they all too often do the screwiest things imaginable.

"The 'critter-contractor' angle is true, too.—Well, the whole business, so far as I know, is the truest-to-color picture of rodeo life that I could manage to put together. In fact, I don't know that anyone has ever done it before. There isn't a killing in every chapter; but there is human drama (which I figured was what the readers of ARGOSY wanted), with action growing out of it . . .

"The artillery drill, by the way, is one of the most dangerous attractions in the whole show. It never fails to bring the crowd up standing. During the big Denver rodeo last summer a man was very nearly killed during this event. And curiously enough, when that happened I had already written a similar incident into my story . . ."

A SUBWAY ride doesn't compare with ARGOSY in the opinion of

MAURICE ETGART

Enclosed find ten coupon votes for the cover picture, "The Marines Having Landed." Also, at the same time, I should like to say a word about the ARGOSY. I have been a reader of ARGOSY for almost fifteen years, and that happened by accident. I picked up an old torn copy from the seat of a subway car, I being at the time employed as a trainman (and I still am). It was badly torn, but on looking it over I started to read it. When I came to a page that was torn out I waited until I was through with my run, then I went to the first news-stand and bought a new copy. Since then I have never missed a copy. It is one of the bright spots in life to me.

As for my opinion of the different stories, I have none. I read them all, and I enjoy the ARGOSY from cover to cover. One can ride twenty-eight miles in the subway for a mere nickel; but ARGOSY takes you around the world for a dime! What more could any one want?

The Bronx, New York City.

FROM the "High Iron" comes the voice of

I. H. BRAYSHAW

To pick out the *best* story published in ARGOSY is beyond me, for after many years reading it, dating back to '98, I can still say they are all good. However, as an old railer, "The Steam and the Glory," published back in March, is outstanding to me. It exemplifies the feelings

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that we old-timers of the high iron had, and still have, for the steam jack. And man, when I read that story I could almost taste the smoke. It almost gave me asthma for a week. William Edward Hayes surely caught the spirit of things there. The juice hogs are all right, and they have come to stay; but they don't have the appeal of the old steam mills on the high iron.

Here's hoping we hear more from Mr. Hayes!

Seattle, Wash.

Of Interest to You!

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C. C. RICE

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—November 16
And don't forget—In the same issue, more of Arthur Hawthorne Carhart's greatest story, "Rodeo" (Part I in this issue).

A 6—9

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